PARTISAN REVIEW

VOLUME XXVI

1959

AMS REPRINT COMPANY
New York 3, N. Y.

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New York, N. Y. 10003

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INDEX TO VOLUME XXVI

	Issue	Page
ABEL, LIONEL		
The Pretender	4	535
ALVAREZ, ALFRED		
London Letter	2	284
London Letter	3	461
Anti-Establishment Drama	4	606
AMMONS, A. R.		
Two Poems	3	439
ANSEN, ALAN		
Dead Drunk (poem)	4	553
ARNOLD, G. L.		
(br) Conviction. Edited by Norman MacKenzie	1	148
ASHBERY, JOHN		
They Dream Only of America poem)	3	438
BALDWIN, JAMES		
Letter From The South	1	72
BERRY, VIRGINIA		
The Sowing (poem)	1	57
BEWLEY, MARIUS		
Poetry Chronicle	2	320
Poetry Chronicle	4	650
BLACKBURN, PAUL		
Fisherman (poem)	3	441
BLOCH-MICHEL, JEAN		
Paris Letter	1	95
Paris Letter	4	637
BROOKE, HUGH		
Petey Passes (poem)	2	241
BRUSTEIN, ROBERT		
Notes on a Suburban Theater	4	593
CHIAROMONTE, NICOLA		
Rome Letter	4	643
CLURMAN, HAROLD		
The Achievement of Bertolt Brecht	4	624
COSER, LEWIS		
(br) The Status Seekers. By Vance Packhard	3	480
CUNNINGHAM, J. V.		
Three Poems	4	556
DECTER, MIDGE		
(br) Beloved Infidel. By Sheilah Graham and Gerold Frank	2	303
DEUTSCHER, ISAAC		
Pasternak and The Calendar of Revolution	2	248
DUPEE, F. W.		
(br) Life Studies. By Robert Lowell	3	473
FAIRFAX, JOHN		
Under And Above Ground Conversations (poem)	3	442
FERRY, DAVID		
In The Dark (poem)	4	555

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

	Issue	Page
FRANK, JOSEPH		
(br) Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism. **By James H. Billington**	1	151
GROSSMAN, ALLEN		
The Bolt (poem)	4	556
HALL, DONALD		
Flodden Field (poem)	4	552
HAMPSHIRE, STUART		
(br) Religion, Politics, and The Higher Learning. **By Morton White**	3	489
HARDWICK, ELIZABETH		
(br) Henderson The Rain King. **By Saul Bellow**	2	299
HOFSTADTER, RICHARD		
(br) The Pragmatic Revolt In American History: Carl Becker and Charles Beard. **By Cushing Strout**	2	316
HOLLANDER, JOHN		
Poetry Chronicle	1	137
Poetry Chronicle	3	503
HOOK, SYDNEY		
Two Types of Existentialist Religion and Ethics	1	58
HOWARD, RICHARD		
Rumors of Real Estate (poem)	2	243
HOWE, IRVING		
Fiction Chronicle	1	130
Freedom and The Ashcan of History	2	266
Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction	3	420
KAZIN, ALFRED		
Psychoanalysis and Literary Culture Today	1	45
(br) Selected Essays. **By Robert Penn Warren**	2	312
KRONENBERGER, LOUIS		
Highbrows and The Theater Today	4	560
LOWELL, ROBERT		
Four Poems from "Life Studies"	1	11
LOWRY, MALCOLM		
Present Estate of Pompeii	2	175
MAILER, NORMAN		
Scenes from the Deer Park	4	527
MALAMUD, BERNARD		
The Maid's Shoes	1	32
MARCUS, STEVEN		
(br) Child of Our Time. **By Michel del Castillo**	1	144
(br) Borstal Boy. **By Brendan Behan**	2	535
MARCUSE, HERBERT		
Notes On The Problem of Historical Laws	1	117
McCARTHY, MARY		
Theater Chronicle	1	100
(br) The Tradition of The New. **By Harold Rosenberg**	3	476
MEYERHOFF, HANS		
(br) Irrational Man. **By William Barrett**	2	290
MURDOCH, IRIS		
A House of Theory	1	17
NOTT, KATHLEEN		
Notes On Feeling and Ideology	1	64
O'GORMAN, NED		
Poem	2	244

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

	Issue	Page
OLSON, CHARLES		
Moonset, Gloucester, December 1, 1957, 1:58 AM (poem)	3	439
PHILLIPS, WILLIAM		
The American Establishment	1	107
PLATH, SYLVIA		
I Want, I Want (poem)	4	558
PODHORETZ, NORMAN		
Norman Mailer: The Embattled Vision	3	371
POPKIN, HENRY		
Camus As Dramatist	3	499
PURDY, JAMES		
Everything Under the Sun	3	363
RALEIGH, JOHN HENRY		
O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night and New England Irish-Catholicism	4	573
READ, STANLEY		
From the Archives At Mari (poem)	3	443
RICH, ADRIENNE		
The Nurse's Tale (poem)	2	247
Bread and Onions (poem)	4	559
ROSENBERG, HAROLD		
Revenge (poem)	2	243
(br) The Empire City. By Paul Goodman	3	493
SCHWARTZ, DELMORE		
The Conclusion (poem)	1	56
The Gift	3	453
SIMMEL, GEORG		
The Adventure	2	231
SNODGRASS, W. D.		
Finding A Poem	2	276
STONE, RUTH		
The Cut Version (poem)	2	245
The Understudies (poem)	3	442
STONE, WALTER		
Inheritance and Descent (poem)	3	437
TRILLING, DIANA		
The Other Night At Columbia: A Report From The Academy	2	214
TRILLING, LIONEL		
A Speech On Robert Frost: A Cultural Episode	3	445
VIDAL, GORE		
Love, Love, Love	4	613
WAIN, JOHN		
(br) Memoirs of A Dutiful Daughter. By Simone de Beauvoir	3	484
WARREN, ROBERT PENN		
Love and Death in Johntown, Tenn.	3	392
WATT, IAN		
Bridges Over the Kwai	1	83
WIDMER, KINGSLEY		
Poetic Naturalism	3	467
WILLIAMS, RAYMOND		
Realism and The Contemporary Novel	2	200
WILSON, ANGUS		
New Playwrights	4	631

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William Phillips, Philip Rahv

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT:
Linda Wolfe

ADVERTISING AND CIRCULATION MANAGER:
Hettie Cohen

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PARTISAN REVIEW is published quarterly by the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, Inc.* at 22 East 17th Street, New York 3, N. Y. Subscriptions: $4 a year, $6.50 for two years, foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $4.50 a year, $7.50 for two years. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency or with $0.75 added for collection charges. Single copy: $1.00. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright 1959, by PARTISAN REVIEW. Second class postage paid at New York, N. Y.

* Transferred from Foundation for Cultural Projects, Inc., November, 1958.

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WINTER, 1959 VOLUME XXVI, NUMBER 1

CONTENTS

FOUR POEMS FROM "LIFE STUDIES," Robert Lowell 11
A HOUSE OF THEORY, Iris Murdoch 17
THE MAID'S SHOES, Bernard Malamud 32
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND LITERARY CULTURE TODAY, Alfred Kazin 45
THE CONCLUSION (verse), Delmore Schwartz 56
THE SOWING (verse), Virginia Berry 57
TWO TYPES OF EXISTENTIALIST RELIGION AND ETHICS, Sidney Hook 58
NOTES ON FEELING AND IDEOLOGY, Kathleen Nott 64
LETTER FROM THE SOUTH, James Baldwin 72
IAN WATT, Bridges Over the Kwai 83
PARIS LETTER, Jean Bloch-Michel 95
THEATER CHRONICLE, Mary McCarthy 100
THE AMERICAN ESTABLISHMENT, William Phillips 107
NOTES ON THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICAL LAWS, Herbert Marcuse 117
BOOKS
REALITIES AND FICTIONS, Irving Howe 130
POETRY CHRONICLE, John Hollander 137
A WORLD THAT NEVER MADE HIM, Steven Marcus 144
LOOKING FORWARD IN ANGER, G. L. Arnold 148
RUSSIAN POPULISM, Joseph Frank 151
CORRESPONDENCE 157

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CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT LOWELL's new volume of poetry, **Life Studies,** will be published this Spring by Farrar, Straus and Cudahy.

IRIS MURDOCH's latest novel is **The Bell.** Her article "A House of Theory" originally appeared in **Conviction,** a volume of essays published in England by Macgibbon and Kee and reviewed in this issue by G. L. Arnold.

KATHLEEN NOTT, author of **The Emperor's Clothes,** is an English poet and philosopher.

RICHARD HOWARD is a young poet and translator who lives in New York City.

JAMES BALDWIN is the well-known novelist whose new book, **Another Country,** will be published by Dial Press later this year.

IAN WATT, author of **The Rise of the Novel,** is now teaching at the University of California.

HERBERT MARCUSE, who is on the faculty of Brandeis University, is the author of **Reason and Revolution, Soviet Marxism** and other books.

JOHN HOLLANDER's first volume of poetry was published by Yale University Press last year.

STEVEN MARCUS, a frequent contributor to PR, teaches at Columbia University.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Beginning with this issue, PR will resume classified advertising. For information about rates, deadlines, procedure, see page 160.

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Robert Lowell

FOUR POEMS FROM "LIFE STUDIES"

GRANDPARENTS

They're altogether otherworldly now,
those adults champing for their ritual Friday spin
to pharmacist and five-and-ten in Brockton.
Back in my throw-away and shaggy span
of adolescence, Grandpa still waves his stick
like a policeman;
Grandmother, like a Mohammedan, still wears her thick
lavender mourning and touring veil;
the Pierce Arrow clears its throat in a horse-stall.
Then the dry road dust rises to whiten
the fatigued elm leaves—
the nineteenth century, tired of children, is gone.
They're all gone into a world of light; the farm's my own.

The farm's my own!
Back there alone,
I keep indoors, and spoil another season.
I hear the rattley little country gramophone
racking its five foot horn:
"O Summer Time!"
Even at noon here the formidable
Ancien Régime still keeps nature at a distance. Five
green-shaded light bulbs spider the billiards table;
no field is greener than its cloth,
where Grandpa, dipping sugar for us both,
once spilled his demitasse.
His favorite ball, the number three,
still hides the coffee stain.

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Never again
to walk there, chalk our cues,
insist on shooting for us both.
Grandpa! Have me, hold me, cherish me!
Tears smut my fingers. There
half my life-lease later,
I hold a yellowing *Illustrated London News*;
still disloyal,
I doodle handlebar
mustaches on the last Russian Czar.

DURING FEVER

All night the crib creaks;
home from the healthy country to the sick city,
my daughter in fever
flounders in her chicken-colored sleeping bag.
"Sorry," she mumbles like her dim-bulb Father, "sorry."

Mother, Mother!
as a gemlike undergraduate,
part criminal and yet a Phi Bete,
I used to barge home late.
Always by the bannister
my milk-tooth mug of milk
was waiting for me on a plate
of *Triskets*.
Often with unadulterated joy,
Mother, we bent by the fire
rehashing Father's character—
when he thought we were asleep,
he'd tiptoe down the stairs
and chain the door.

Mother, your master bedroom
looked way from the ocean.

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You had a window seat,
an electric blanket,
a silver hot water bottle
monogrammed like a hip-flask,
Italian china fruity
with bunches and berries
and proper *putti.*
The nuptial bed,
gold, yellow and green,
was as big as a bathroom.

Born ten years and yet an aeon
too early for the *twenties,*
Mother, you smile
as if you saw your father
inches away yet hidden, as when he groused behind a screen
over a National Geographic Magazine,
back in those settled years of World War One.
Terrible that old life of decency
without unseemly intimacy
or quarrels, when the unemancipated woman
still had her Freudian papa and maids!

WAKING IN THE BLUE

The night attendant, a B. U. sophomore,
rouses from the mare's-nest of his drowsy head
propped on the *Meaning of Meaning.*
He catwalks down our corridor.
Azure day
makes my agonized blue window bleaker.
Crows maunder on the petrified fairway.
Absence! My heart grows tense
as though a harpoon were sparring for the kill.
(This is the house of the "mentally ill.")

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What use is my sense of humor?
I grin at Stanley, now sunk in his sixties,
once a Harvard all-American fullback,
(If such were possible!)
still hoarding the build of a boy in his twenties,
as he soaks, a ramrod
with the muscle of a seal,
in his long tub,
vaguely urinous from the Victorian plumbing.
A kingly granite profile in a crimson golf-cap,
worn all day, all night.
He thinks only of his figure,
of slimming on sherbet and ginger ale—
more cut off from words than a seal.

This is the way day breaks in Bowditch Hall at McLean's;
the hooded night lights bring out "Bobbie,"
Porcellian '29,
a replica of Louis XVI
without the wig—
redolent and roly-poly as a sperm whale,
as he swashbuckles about in his birthday suit
and horses at chairs.

These victorious figures of bravado ossified young.

In between the limits of day,
hours and hours go by under the crew haircuts
and slightly too non-sensical bachelor twinkle
of the Roman Catholic attendants.
(There are no Mayflower
screwballs in the Catholic Church.)

After a hearty New England breakfast,
I weigh two hundred pounds
this morning. Cock of the walk,
I preen in my turtle-necked French sailor's jersey
before the metal shaving mirrors,
and see the shaky future grow familiar

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in the pinched, indigenous faces
of these thoroughbred mental cases,
twice my age and half my weight.
We are all old-timers,
each of us holds a locked razor.

HOME AFTER THREE MONTHS AWAY

Gone now the baby's nurse,
a lioness who ruled the roost
and made the Mother cry.
She used to tie
gobbets of porkrind in bowknots of gauze—
three months they hung like soggy toast
on our eight foot magnolia tree,
and helped the English sparrows
weather a Boston winter.

Three months, three months!
Is Richard now himself again?
Dimpled with exaltation,
my daughter holds her levee in the tub.
Our noses rub,
each of us pats a stringy lock of hair—
they tell me nothing's gone.
Though I am forty-one,
not forty now, the time I put away
was child's-play. After thirteen weeks
my child still dabs her cheeks
to start me shaving. When
we dress her in her sky-blue corduroy,
she changes to a boy,
and floats my shaving brush
and washcloth in the flush . . .

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Dearest, I cannot loiter here
in lather like a polar bear.

Recuperating, I neither spin nor toil.
Three stories down below,
a choreman tends our coffin's length of soil,
and seven horizontal tulips blow.
Just twelve months ago,
these flowers were pedigreed
imported Dutchmen; now no one need
distinguish them from weed.
Bushed by the late spring snow,
they cannot meet
another year's snowballing enervation.

I keep no rank nor station.
Cured, I am frizzled, stale and small.

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Iris Murdoch

A HOUSE OF THEORY

The socialist movement in England is suffering a loss of energy: and this is a misfortune which touches the whole community. The Tories are, by their nature, not a party of ideals and moral inventions. It is rather their function, a function which liberal-minded Socialists must welcome in general even if they often deplore it in particular, to check and criticize the more abstract visions of the Left. But now the salt itself seems to have lost its savor. The more progressive section of society seems able, in this time, to provide very little in the way of guidance and inspiration. There is a certain moral void in the life of the country. How has this come about?

It does not seem difficult to analyze the sources of moral energy which fed the Socialist movement in the past. First and most primitive was the desire for human equality, the valuing of the poorest he with the richest he: a desire made more intense by the miseries of the Industrial Revolution. Developing later, and giving to the movement its most characteristic and probably most profound motive, was the conception of exploitation, whose technical form was the Labor Theory of Value. Joined with this was what one might call Benthamite efficiency, the desire to tidy up society, sweeping away metaphysical obscurantism and outdated tradition, and plan rationally for the happiness which was so patently lacking. To be compared and contrasted with this was Marxist efficiency, closely knit theoretical scientific Socialism, offering a more complex philosophy and a more revolutionary vision. A product of this confident science was a certain determinism whose appeal was religious as well as scientific: the apocalyptic belief that capitalism was doomed, the Messianic belief in the role of the proletariat.

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Independent of these sources of power but mingled with all of them was a general revolt against convention, the resistance to the nineteenth-century father-figure in his many guises, the revolt against sexual taboos and restrictions, the movement for the liberation of women. With this one may connect the hatred of industrial civilization which certainly moved many people and which sometimes led to nostalgia for the apparent simplicity of the medieval world: all that poor Morris had in mind when he cried that "Shoddy is king!" Consolation and promise were, however, to be found in the sheer energy generated by the working men's associations themselves, the discovery of active community and common purpose, the warmth of proletarian solidarity. While common in some way to almost all, and equally Christian, Marxist and anarchist in its inspiration, was the vision of an ideal community in which work would once again be creative and meaningful, and human brotherhood would be restored; whereas now the working classes were deracinate and disinherited, human nature both in them and in their masters mutilated and divided: all that could be summed up in the Hegelian concept of "alienation." These—and the list could doubtless be extended and the items subdivided in different ways—were the complex and various ideals and motives of Socialism.

Nearly all this great accumulation of energy has now been dissipated, by the achievement of goals which satisfied the desires in question, or by the achievement of something which made the desires less sharp. As a result largely of the working-class movement itself together with the development of new economic techniques we have the Welfare State. Many of the most obvious injustices and deprivations have been remedied. The rich are not so rich nor the poor so poor, and there has been a serious attempt to create equality of opportunity. The sense of exploitation has faded and the struggle for equality tends to take the form of the struggle for higher wages. It now seems possible that capitalism is not doomed after all, or at least not doomed in the dramatic manner once envisaged. On both the theoretical and the practical plane economists have led us to believe that capitalism can (perhaps) overcome its tendency to periodic crises, and does not inevitably (and, as was thought, increasingly) grind the faces of the poor: thus removing the sense of impending cataclysm, destroying the attraction of the Labor

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Theory of Value, and blunting the Socialist claim to provide the only true science of society.

The appeal of Marxism as a body of doctrine, never strong in this country, has diminished with the lengthening history of the U.S.S.R. Marx and Marxist theorizing have been left to the Communists. The revolt against convention which was a sacred duty in the nineteenth century and between the wars was at least still fun, is now, as a result of the greater flexibility of society, not obviously either. Shoddy remains king, but nobody bothers much. The vision of the ideal society, which, outside Marxism, was often associated with opposition to parliamentary methods, lingered a while in Guild Socialism, and perished with the development of the parliamentary Labour Party. The sentiments of "proletarian solidarity" have given way to the sentiments of the trade union movement. Socialism no longer seems (as it seemed to certain favored spirits) something essentially and profoundly Christian. The anarchists are gone. What has triumphed (with many results for which we are profoundly thankful) and what is still largely with us is Benthamite efficiency, the spirit of the Fabians. Socialism, in the course of its rapid and successful development, has lost even the oddments of theory with which it started out.

It will be argued that the absence of Socialist theory is neither surprising nor deplorable. The British were never ones for theory in any case. We have always been empiricist, anti-metaphysical in philosophy, mistrustful of theoretical systems. It is true, indeed, that our political thought has been almost entirely sceptical, and could be summed up under the three heads of Tory scepticism, scientific scepticism, and Liberal humanist scepticism. Hume and Burke would represent the first. (Don't theorize: let habit and tradition solve your problems.) Bentham, with some assistance from Hobbes, would represent the second. (Don't theorize: theories are troublesome metaphysical nonsense. What matters in society is the mechanics of satisfaction.) Locke and Mill, with Kant in the background, would represent the third. (Don't theorize: empirical truths are unsystematic and moral truths can't be demonstrated; so be an undogmatic but rational respecter of persons.) However, all these thinkers were themselves theorists in the minimal sense that they invented certain concepts, presented certain schemes and pictures,

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in terms of which we can understand their differences and conceive them as constituting a conversation. The Liberals particularly set before us, unsystematically but with a power which has kept its hold upon our imagination, certain spiritual values "fixed" in concepts such as that of Natural Rights.

Now "Socialist theory," in so far as it existed here, was not directly a product of academic thinkers. It was not in its nature to be. It consisted rather of overlapping sets of ideas argumentatively put together by bodies such as the Socialist League and the Fabian Society. We have never produced a great Socialist philosopher, and we have paid very limited attention to the one whom we had in our midst. However, our Socialist thinking was strongly nourished by philosophical ideas which had become to some extent common property: the ideas of Locke and the Utilitarians, as well as modified versions of Marxism and Utopian theories imported from France. A Socialist philosophy does not, and should not, grow independently of the main stream of philosophical ideas. With this in mind, we turn from the "conceptual conversation" of the past to look at the contemporary scene, where we notice, of course, a marked contrast. Developments in mathematical logic, the influence of scientific method, the techniques of linguistic analysis, have combined to produce a new philosophy even more anti-theoretical than its sceptical predecessor. The creative aspect of philosophy is reduced almost to nil, or rather tends to be limited to the invention of what one might call "logical gadgets." (Russell's Theory of Descriptions would be a distinguished example.) The instrument that results is for its purposes excellent, and the critical task of philosophy, of great importance in a liberal society, has never been performed with greater exactness and rigor. Many persistent philosophical problems have been solved by the new method, which represents a genuine advance and discovery. One consequence, however (and I shall argue an unnecessary one), is that a certain area of thought which was formerly influential is becoming denuded. As philosophy is steadily drawn in the direction of logic and becomes increasingly a matter for highly trained experts, it separates itself from, and discourages, the vaguer and more generally comprehensible theorizing which it used to nourish and be nourished by; and the serious student who is either studying philosophy or is influenced by it (and there are many of

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the latter) develops an almost excessive fear of imprecision. "Everything that can be said can be said clearly." Outside the small area of possible clarity lies the dangerous region of "mushy" thinking from which attention is averted. The ideal is a demonstration, however tiny, which is clean, sterile and conclusive.

In considering the way in which the modern techniques have affected moral and political theory, and through them affected a range of less specialized theorizing, it is necessary to consider in more detail the "elimination of metaphysics." In the past philosophers had invented concepts expressive of moral belief and presented them as if they were facts concerning the nature of the mind or of the world. Philosophy since Hume has, in opposing dogmatic rationalist metaphysics in general, been critical of this tendency, but in varying ways. Briefly, criticism of metaphysics may proceed along Humian, Kantian, or Hegelian lines. Hume, who wished to maintain as rigorously as possible that we know only what our senses tell us, denied the existence of moral "facts" or "realities," analyzed moral concepts into non-rational feelings and imaginative habits, and was prepared to let basic empirical concepts suffer the same fate. Kant, anxious to defend both the reality of our empirical knowledge and the dignity of our moral intimations, changed Hume's habits of imagination into "categories," or fixed formal modes of apprehension which if directed upon empirical data would yield knowledge. Other matters, such as the moral law and the destiny of the soul, could only be objects of belief, although the reality and something of the nature of the spiritual realm were suggested by the demands of conscience. Hegel altered Kant's criticism in a fundamental way when he conceived the categories as the forms not only of our knowledge of empirical objects, but also of our apprehension of social, psychological and spiritual realities, and subjected them to historical treatment, taking the pattern of their development initially from the history of the changing ideas of the human race.

These philosophers were all critical of dogmatic rationalist metaphysical arguments (such as those used by St. Thomas) and so put a question mark beside moral beliefs (ethical, political, religious) which rested formerly on such arguments; but they dif-

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fered significantly in the place which they assigned to beliefs of this kind under the new regime. Neither Hume nor Kant had any interest in variety of belief, nor, for these purposes, any historical sense; and they virtually removed from the scene of rational discourse all theories except those specifically accredited by their own philosophical methods. Hume, whose "elimination" followed the simple lines of atomic empiricism, regarded all beliefs as equally irrational, but some as inevitable and convenient. Civilized life after all rested on moral instincts, and Hume described those of his own society. Kant more systematically attempted to show why our knowledge was limited to certain kinds of object, and in doing so pictured the mind as solely concerned with the objects of empirical observation and science. He allowed in addition one belief (the belief in Reason, with the related and tentative belief in God); and all other theories were classed together as superstition. Hegel differed from Hume and Kant in that he did not regard the fact that a belief or theory had rested upon a discredited type of philosophical argument as automatically denuding the theory of philosophical interest or even of truth. He did not class theories as either whole truths or total errors, but allowed to all the influential beliefs that men have held the status of interpretation and discovery of the world. All three philosophers are, of course, vulnerable themselves, though not in the essentials of what they have to say, to attacks by modern critics; all three, in different ways, can lay claim to the title of "empiricist."

Modern British philosophy is Humian and Kantian in inspiration. It follows Hume and Kant in regarding sense experience as the only basis for knowledge, and it follows Kant in attempting more specifically to show that concepts not so based are "empty." Moral and political philosophies, never the center of modern developments, have followed in the wake. Attention was concentrated upon the error by which former philosophers imagined themselves to be making quasi-factual discoveries when really they were preaching. Since morality could not be "proved" by philosophical argument, philosophy now aimed at studying it in a non-partisan manner, analyzing the "logic" of moral discourse in general, and leaving moral exhortation to others. Moral judgments, since they did not admit of empirical verification, were first said to be "emotive" (a Humian position).

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Later they were likened to imperatives (a Kantian position). In this second and more subtle phase Kant's single belief in Reason was refashioned into a formula which purported to give the defining characteristics of any moral judgment as such. A certain rationality, universality, consistency, was thought of (with minor variations) as defining the *form* of morality irrespective of its *content*. The variegated area of moral belief or ideology (the special religious and social concepts which guide choice, and which are in many cases a legacy from the metaphysical philosophers) was usually treated, together with the actual patterns of choice, as part of the *content,* the region of morality which is a matter of personal decision and not a proper subject for analysis. Such beliefs were not, of course, demonstrable by philosophical argument (it was the mistake of the old philosophers to think that they were) and they came to be seen as the idiosyncratic "color" of a moral attitude, something nebulous and hazy, which for purposes of exposition and example was best analyzed away into actual choices at the empirical level. The moral agent is thus pictured, in a manner which remains essentially Kantian, as using his reason to survey the ordinary factual world, and making decisions therein which he will defend by reference to facts and to simple principles offered as patently rational. He is *not* pictured as using his reason to explore the intermediate area of concepts. Moral action, in short, is seen as the making of sensible choices and the giving of sensible and simple reasons. It is not seen as the activity of theorizing, imagining, or seeking for deeper insight. [1]

Such a situation could hardly be promising for the department of ethics which deals with political concepts; and indeed whereas moral philosophy survives by the skin of its teeth, political philosophy has almost perished. Whereas some sense (misleading perhaps but just comprehensible) can be made of the idea of the "fundamental logical form of a moral judgment," very little sense can be made of the idea of the "fundamental logical form of a political judgment." The "form" of political thinking cannot be thus plausibly

1. See especially R. M. Hare *The Language of Morals,* and also articles by Hampshire, Urmson and others. It will be noted that this position is curiously existentialist in flavor. Popular existentialism is Kantianism with Reason in the veiled role of Kierkegaard's God. All positive beliefs stand in danger of *mauvaise foi.*

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divided from its "content." It is impossible not to regard political philosophy in an historical manner; and it is very difficult to extract from it the type of compact philosophical problem whose statement and attempted solution now alone count as really "doing philosophy." Exercises in political philosophy consist usually in carefully restricted discussion of a well-known concept (such as the General Will), attempting with brief and undetailed historical reference to illustrate the nature and "function" of the concept. These discussions are often valuable; but they are not popular because they necessarily lack precision of a logical or near-logical variety, and their atmosphere is such as to suggest that "political concepts" are things of the past. They are, after all, metaphysical beliefs, or, to be more exact, they are personal evaluations and social recommendations disguised as truths about the nature of man. It is the (logical and morally neutral) task of the philosopher to pierce this disguise, and to separate the solid recommendation from the conceptual mask which comes away, as it were, empty. The giving of actual political advice and the suggestion of moves in definite political dilemmas are, of course, not the business of philosophy. Here again, political activity, like moral activity, is thought of as the making of empirical choices, and not as itself an activity of theorizing. The most consistent exposition of this generally favored view is in T. D. Weldon's *The Vocabulary of Politics*. A curious result of this development is that liberal and progressive thinkers who are touched by modern philosophy come on what they take to be logical grounds to the same conclusions about political theorizing to which conservative thinkers come on frankly moral grounds. Berlin and Weldon and Popper agree with T. S. Eliot and Michael Oakeshott that systematic political theorizing is a bad thing.[2] The former think

2. Mr. Eliot forms in fact a curious counterpart in this respect to Bertrand Russell. Both share the view that *real* thinking is highly systematic (for Russell, mathematics, for Eliot, Thomist theology) and accept the implication that thinking about society is another matter. Russell, when acting as a social critic, drops his rigorous philosophical *persona* and is clearly engaged in a quite different kind of activity. Mr. Eliot, who reserves a unique pinnacle for Dante because (unlike Shakespeare) he combined literary ability with a background of real (i.e. systematic theological) thought denies the name of "thinking" to social analysis such as that practiced by D. H. Lawrence. Mr. Eliot's theology is, however, more relevant to his social criticism than Lord Russell's mathematics is to his, and this in itself is an advantage. Right-wing thinkers may be shy of system at the political level but they are not shy of moralizing.

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it so because it is "metaphysical" and opinionated and obscures the scientific business of altering our society for the better. The latter think it so because it interferes with the deep operation of traditions which should not be tampered with by critical reflection. Bentham and Hume are still with us; but we are losing touch with Locke and Mill.

The discrediting of theory has, then, taken place as a result of a combination of different tendencies: Tory scepticism, Benthamite scepticism, a Kantian protestant fear of "superstitions," and more recently a dislike of Marxism, all apparently supported by the anti-metaphysical destructive techniques of modern philosophy. It is moreover felt that theorizing is anti-liberal (an idea which it is easy to extract from Kant) and that liberal-minded persons should surround their choices with a minimum of theory, relying rather on open above board references to facts or to principles which are simple and comprehensible to all. Here it is important, in accordance indeed with the clear-headed methods of analytical philosophy, in order to see what one is doing, to separate neutral arguments from evaluations. The point, briefly made, is that the "elimination of metaphysics," though it shows that moral beliefs were often supported by erroneous arguments, does not *ipso facto* "discredit" the area of moral belief, properly understood as an area of conceptual moral exploration. All that the anti-metaphysical arguments make clear (and one would not wish to deny this) is that moral theorizing is not the discovery of bogus "facts," but is an activity whose purpose and justification are moral. Hegel understood and displayed this, though he also sinned by picturing moral exploration dogmatically within a rigid hierarchy of ideas. There is no philosophical (or scientific) reason why there should not be an area of theory, reflection, meditation, contemplation, *between* ourselves and the simple empirical levels of action, so long as certain arguments are eschewed, and so long as it is clearly recognized that the purpose of the theorizing is moral clarification and understanding; and moral, political, and religious theories have, after all, often served this

Whereas Left-wing (non-Communist) utterances must be "scientific" or else offered as fragmentary personal notions. The greater moral solemnity of the Right (and of the extreme Left) makes them, I suspect, in certain ways profounder critics of our society at present.

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purpose in the past and have not always been "mere superstitions." It therefore emerges that the choice made by our intellectuals against the development of theories is a moral choice.

Is it a right choice? I think not. There is a serious and growing void in our thinking about moral and social problems. This void is uneasily felt by society at large and is the more distressing since we are now perhaps for the first time in our history feeling the loss of religion as a consolation and guide; until recently various substitutes (Socialism itself, later Communism, Pacifism, Internationalism) were available; now there seems to be a shortage even of substitutes. The claim of Socialism to be a "science" has become, after many setbacks, a trifle less confident, and has certainly lost the spiritual appeal which it once had. Of course Socialism will continue to attempt to constitute itself a science, in the sense of a highly organized investigation of the mechanics of society. But, and especially since it cannot now claim to be the scientific study of an inevitable quasi-biological development, it should, in my view, also far more frankly and more systematically declare itself a morality. Our Socialist ancestors had ideals but no techniques. We are often amazed at their naiveté. We have the techniques; *these* we can explain clearly. But we can give only a rather brief and denuded explanation of our ideals. We have reached a stage where the amount of theory is decreasing while the social need for it increases. The danger represented by what is called the "managerial society" is the danger (already diagnosed by Marx as characteristic of capitalism) of the division of the population into experts and ignorant (though perhaps contented) masses with no communication between them; and we have now the additional spectacle of the division of the experts into mutually non-comprehending groups. What is needed is an *area of translation,* an area in which specialized concepts and recommendations can be seen and understood in the light of moral and social ideas which have a certain degree of complexity and yet are not the sole property of technicians. There is a Tory contention that theorizing leads to violence, and there is a liberal contention that theories are obscurantist and blinding. Now on the contrary it is the absence of theory which renders us blind and which enables bureaucracy, in all its sense, to keep us mystified; and as for violence,

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the absence of civilized theorizing can also lead in that direction. It is dangerous to starve the moral imagination of the young. We require, in addition to our "science," a social analysis which is both detailed and frank in its moral orientation. A more ambitious conceptual picture, thought out anew in the light of modern critical philosophy and our improved knowledge of the world, of the moral center and moral direction of Socialism would enable those of us who are not experts to pick up the facts of our situation in a reflective, organized and argumentative way: would give us what Shelley called the power to imagine what we know. Socialist thought is hampered, and the appeal of Socialism is restricted, because our technical concepts are highly esoteric and our moral concepts are excessively simple and there is nothing in between. We need, and the Left should provide, some refuge from the cold open field of Benthamite empiricism, a framework, a house of theory.

In response to these ambitious desires it may be coldly argued that "Socialist theory" was a product of the working-class movement, and that the working-class movement no longer exists, whereas the trade union movement does; and that it is impossible to call up moral visions in a situation in which there is no material incentive to make people lift their eyes to the hills. Further, it will be said that a perfectly good Socialist theory of a down-to-earth kind does exist and indeed fills many volumes. Those who ask for information about Socialism are not left unanswered; what more is required? If it is a "philosophy" that is wanted, that can hardly be produced on the spur of the moment and would in any case be itself something esoteric and technical.

It is doubtless true in a sense that the working-class movement as a dynamic theory-generating body with immediate objectives does not at present exist. There is less appetite for ideas. Education is no longer seen as the road to freedom; it is seen as the road to a higher salary. However, the working class exists, and with it many of the ills of capitalist society which were a scandal to our forefathers, and a large body of increasingly vague but loyal Socialist opinion exists, too. The question must be continually asked: how are we to keep *thought* about Socialism and *moral concern* about Socialism alive in a Welfare State? Spiritual unrest and even decisive moral reactions are not lacking. "Public opinion" is the name of

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a force which should control and check the development of bureaucracy; and public opinion has shown itself of late, to the dismay of certain Tories, to be still both lively and powerful. Its activity, however, has been limited to the sudden assertion of some absolute value (usually in the field of foreign affairs), obscurely grasped, without any connection of a theoretical kind being established between the occasions. A religious and moral vocabulary is the possession now of a few; and most people lack the word with which to say just what is felt to be wrong is wrong.

If in the hope of finding such words we turn to the available Socialist "literature" we are likely to be disappointed. In the old days professional and amateur philosophizing fed the public mind with ideas. Now, for a larger vision. we have to look back to Laski or Tawney, or search for hints in eccentric and little-known works by Christians or Marxists. What we have plenty of, and what we find officially in the center of the picture, are detailed technical books and pamphlets in which the author tells us briefly that we need public ownership in order to bring about equality, and then hurries on to the details of investment policy. The motive, the passion, in much of this literature is patently that of an expert making an efficient plan. Needless to say one is glad of such experts, and it would be an impertinence in the uninitiated to criticize what they cannot understand. But what one requires as well is a little more pausing at the first stage, a little more analysis, in terms which are not those of the economist, of an idea such as that of equality—which is, in fact, in danger of becoming the only influential "general idea" of contemporary Socialism. More theoretical exploration of the aims of Socialism, those aims to which all techniques are properly subordinate, would benefit both sides of the specialist barrier. The expert would gain that unifying vision which is needed to prompt more inspired and imaginative uses of technique. He would be less isolated, more responsible, more often compelled to explain, and having to explain, to connect, to translate, deepens understanding; while the average person would gain a more complex, and hence more influential, grasp upon what is being done on his behalf, instead of coming straightaway up against the blank wall of economics.

It is not true that "everyone knows what is wrong with our society" and differs only over a simple choice of solutions. What

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we see as wrong, and our ability to express what is wrong in a profound, subtle and organized way, will influence our conception of a solution as well as providing us with the energy to seek it. We have not mended our society since its mutilation by nineteenth-century industrialism. There is less poverty but no more (in some ways less) true community life. Work has become less unpleasant without becoming more significant. The gulf remains between the skilled and creative few and the unskilled and uncreative many. What was formerly called the proletariat has lost what culture it once had, and gained no true substitute. A stream of half-baked amusements hinders thought and the enjoyment of art and even of conversation. Equality of opportunity produces, not a society of equals, but a society in which the class division is made more sinister by the removal of intelligent persons into the bureaucracy and the destruction of their roots and characteristics as members of the mass. In short, a proletariat in the fundamental sense intended by Marx still exists: a deracinate, disinherited and excluded mass of people. Only this mass is now quiescent, its manner of life largely suburban and its outlook "petty bourgeois," and it increasingly lacks any concept of itself as deprived.

This list of grievances, whose items would be regarded as obvious in some quarters and eccentric in others, suggests to me the following, which again will seem obvious to some. The Socialist movement should most explicitly bring back into the center of its thinking its original great source of inspiration and reflection, the problem of labor: the problem, that is, of the transformation of labor from something senseless which forms no real part of the personality of the laborer into something creative and significant. To do this would involve a rethinking and regrouping on the theoretical plane of concepts such as "exploitation" and "alienation" which were formerly gathered about the Labor Theory of Value. The familiar ideas of "equality," "democracy," "freedom" need to be understood anew in the light of the problem of labor and not treated as independent "absolutes" whose meaning is taken for granted. To treat them so is ultimately to imperil them. Theory is needed to refresh the tired imagination of practice. Our available techniques seem uninteresting because we lack the vision to grasp their possibilities. A line of thought such as I have in mind leads very directly to problems

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that have been immensely discussed and considered. Can we maintain educational standards while making education more "democratic"? Can we make technical training more universal and more humane while still meeting the demands of industry? Is the "opposition" role of the trade unions a hindrance to "industrial democracy"? It is not that these matters have not been studied; it is rather that they have been studied on too severely practical a level and without a sufficient consultation of our final aims. We should profit by widening the area in which they could be discussed with intelligence and interest.

A study of nationalization, such as *Industry and Society,* for instance, representing an official attitude, combines complexity at the technical level with question-begging simplicity at the moral and theoretical level. "Nationalization" is spoken of in terms of redistribution of wealth, making important powers socially responsible, and enabling the State to profit from the present structure of our economy. "Equality" is envisaged as the abolition of private shareholding and inherited position. Keynes is quoted to show that with the dissociation of ownership of industry from its control there is a "natural line of development" in the direction of State Socialism. There is a momentary reference to "joint consultation." Nothing whatever is said about conditions and nature of work. Whereas critics (the authors of *The Insiders,* for instance) who rightly suggest that "public ownership must be seen in the context of the original Socialist goal of industrial democracy," and who point out the extent to which *Industry and Society* takes our present economic and social structure for granted, still conceive the problem in terms of "the democratization of power," rather than in terms of what such a shift of power would be designed to achieve. But the fascination of the means should not obscure the end; and to *see* the end we must to some extent separate it from the often seemingly barren complexities of the means; we must to some extent lend it the remoteness and flexibility of a "theory." The problem of the transformation of labor is not only the original center of Socialist thought, it is the problem of the managerial society. Even to pose it with enough clarity would help to counteract the movement of talent and interest toward the levels of bureaucratic control and to send it back toward the levels of the unskilled. But for such an idea to be

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fruitful, a source of inspiration and controversy, it needs to be presented as an autonomous moral conception, independent of, and ultimately sovereign over, the mere notions of efficiency and rational "tidying up" of capitalist society into which Socialism is in danger of degenerating.

If we seek here for inspiration in our own tradition we have not far to look. The Guild Socialists dissented on precisely this point from their less ambitious and more purely Benthamite colleagues, in that the latter were concerned with the damage done to the consumer and the former with the damage done to the producer. The Guild Socialists were deeply concerned with the destruction of community life, the degradation of work, the division of man from man which the economic relationships of capitalism had produced; and they looked to the factories themselves, for the restoration of what was lost. Such ideas were and are easy targets for mockery, and in the old Guild Socialist form were doubtless quite impracticable; and they faded from the scene partly because they were tied to inadequate techniques, and partly because the conception of the Welfare State presented an easier and more obviously urgent and attractive target. With its achievement it is necessary to renew our study of the more difficult and fundamental problems of capitalism. We cannot live without the "experts." But the true "open society" in the modern world is one in which expertise is not mysterious; and the only way to prevent it from becoming mysterious is continually to subordinate its activities to a lively and *interested* public opinion; and this in turn will languish without "theories." The Welfare State marks the successful end of the first road which the Socialist movement in this country elected to travel. It is time now to go back and explore the other road, to go back to the point of divergence, the point not so very far back at which we retained as a living morality ideas which were common to Marx and to William Morris.

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Bernard Malamud

THE MAID'S SHOES

The maid had left her name with the porter's wife. She said she was looking for steady work and would take anything but preferred not to work for an old woman. Still, if she had to, she would. She was about forty-five and looked older. Her face was worn but her hair was all black and her eyes and lips were pretty. She had few good teeth. When she laughed she was embarrassed around the mouth. Although it was cold early in October, that year in Rome, and the chestnut vendors were already hunched over their pans of glowing charcoals, the maid wore only a threadbare black cotton dress which had a rent down the left side, where about two inches of seam had opened on the hip, showing her underwear. She had sewn the seam several times but this was one of the times it was open again. Her heavy but well-formed legs were bare and she wore house slippers as she talked to the portinaia; she had done a single day's washing for a signora down the street and carried her shoes in a paper bag. There were three comparatively new apartment houses on the hilly street, and she had left her name in all of them.

The portinaia, a dumpy woman wearing a brown tweed skirt she had got from an English family that had once lived in the building, said she would remember the maid, but then she forgot; she forgot until an American professor moved into a furnished apartment on the fifth floor and asked her to help him find a maid. The portinaia brought him a girl from the neighborhood, a girl of sixteen, recently from Umbria, who came with her aunt. But the professor, Dr. O. E. Krantz, did not like the way the aunt played up certain qualities of the girl, so he sent her away. He told the portinaia he was looking for an older woman, someone he wouldn't have to worry about. Then the portinaia thought of the maid who had

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left her name and address, and she went to her house on the Via Appia Antica near the catacombs and told her an American was looking for a maid, mezzo servizio; she would give him her name if the maid agreed to make it worth her while. The maid, whose name was Rosa, shrugged her shoulders and looked stiffly down the street. She said she had nothing to offer the portinaia. "Look at what I'm wearing," she said. "Look at this junk pile, can you call it a house? I live in it with my son and his bitch of a wife, who counts every spoonful of soup that I put into my mouth. They treat me like dirt, and dirt is all I own."

"In that case, I can do nothing for you," the portinaia said. "I have myself and my husband to think of." But she returned from the bus stop and said she would recommend the maid to the American professor if she gave her five thousand lire the first time she was paid.

"How much will he pay?" the maid asked the portinaia.

"I would ask for eighteen thousand a month. Tell him you have to spend over two hundred lire for carfare every day."

"That's almost right," Rosa said. "It will cost me forty one way and forty back. But if he pays me eighteen thousand, I'll give you five, if you sign that that's all I owe you."

"I will sign," said the portinaia, and she recommended the maid to the American professor.

O. E. Krantz was a nervous man of sixty. He had mild gray eyes, a broad mouth and a pointed, clefted chin. His very round head was bald and he had a bit of a belly, although the rest of him looked thin. He was a somewhat comical-looking man but an authority in law, the portinaia told Rosa. The professor sat at a table in his study, writing all day, yet was up every half hour or so on some pretext or other to look nervously around. He worried about how things were going and often came out of his study to see. He would watch Rosa working, then went in and wrote. After a half hour he would come out, to wash his hands in the bathroom or drink a glass of water, but in reality he was passing by to see what she was doing. She was doing what she had to. Rosa worked quickly, especially when he was watching. She seemed, he thought, to be unhappy, but that was none of his business. Their lives, he knew, were full of troubles, often sordid; it was best to be detached.

This was the professor's second year in Italy; the first he had

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spent in Milan, but the second was to be in Rome. He had rented a large, three-bedroom apartment, one of which he used as a study. His wife and daughter, who had returned for a visit to the States in August, would use the other bedrooms; they were due back before not very long. When the ladies returned, he told Rosa, he would put her on full time. There was a maid's room where she could sleep; indeed, which she already used as her own though she was in the apartment only from nine till four. Rosa agreed to a full time arrangement because it would mean all her meals in and nothing to pay her son and his dog-faced wife.

While they were waiting for Mrs. Krantz to arrive, Rosa did all the marketing and cooking. She made the professor's breakfast when she arrived and his lunch at one. She offered to stay later than four, to prepare supper, but he preferred to take that meal out. After shopping, she cleaned the house thoroughly, mopping the marble floors with a wet rag she pushed around with a stick, though the floors did not look particularly dusty to him. She also washed and ironed his laundry. She was a good worker, her slippers clip-clopping as she hurried from one room to the next, and she frequently finished up about an hour or so before she was due to go home, so she retired to the maid's room and there read *Tempo* or *Epoca,* or sometimes a love story all in photographs, with the words of the story printed in italics under each picture. Often she pulled her bed down and lay in it under blankets, to keep warm. The weather had turned rainy, and now the apartment was uncomfortably cold. The custom of the condominium in this apartment house was not to heat until the fifteenth of November, and if it was cold before then, as it was now, the people of the house had to do the best they could. The cold disturbed the professor, who wrote with his gloves and hat on, and increased his nervousness so that he was out to look at her more often. He wore a heavy blue bathrobe over his clothes; sometimes his bathrobe belt was wrapped around a hot water bottle that he had placed against his back, under his suit coat. Sometimes he sat on the hot water bag as he wrote, a sight that caused Rosa, when she saw this once, to smile behind her hand. If he left the hot water bag in the dining room after lunch, Rosa asked if she might use it. As a rule he allowed her to, and then she did her work with the rubber bag pressed by her elbow against her stomach. She said she

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had trouble with her liver. That was why the professor did not mind her going to the maid's room to lie down before leaving, after she had finished her work.

Once, after Rosa had gone home, sniffing tobacco smoke in the corridor near her room, the professor entered it to investigate. The room was not more than an elongated cubicle with a narrow bed that lifted sideways against the wall; there was also a small green cabinet; and a tiny bathroom containing a toilet, and a sitzbath fed by a cold water tap. She often did the laundry on a washboard in the sitzbath, but never, so far as he knew, had bathed in it. The day before her daughter-in-law's name day she had asked permission to take a hot bath in his tub in the big bathroom, and though he hesitated a moment, the professor finally said yes. In her room, he opened a drawer at the bottom of the cabinet and found a hoard of cigarette butts, butts he had left in ash trays. He noticed, too, that she collected his old newspapers and magazines from the waste baskets. She saved cord, paper bags and rubber bands, also pencil stubs he threw away. After he had found that out, he occasionally gave her some meat left over from lunch, and cheese that had gone dry, to take with her. For this she brought him flowers. She also brought a dirty egg or two her daughter-in-law's hen had laid, but he thanked her and said the yolks were too strong for his taste. He noticed that she needed a pair of shoes, for those she put on to go home in were split at the soles, and she wore the same black dress with the tear in it every day,which embarrassed him when he had to speak to her; however, he thought he would refer these matters to his wife when she arrived.

As jobs went, Rosa knew she had a good one. The professor paid well and on time, and he never ordered her around in the haughty manner of some of her Italian employers. This one was nervous and fussy but not a bad sort. His main fault was his silence. Though he could speak a better than passable Italian, he preferred, when not at work, to sit in an armchair in the living room, reading. Only two souls in the whole house, you would think they would want to talk to each other once in a while. Sometimes when she served him a cup of coffee as he read, she tried to get in a word about her troubles. She wanted to tell him about her long, impoverished widowhood, how badly her son had turned out, and what her daughter-in-

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law was like to live with. But though he listened politely; although they shared the same roof, and even the same hot water bottle and bath tub, they did not share speech. He said no more to her than a crow would, and clearly showed he preferred to be left alone. So she left him alone and was lonely in the apartment. Working for foreigners has its advantages, she thought, but it also has its disadvantages.

After a while, the professor noticed that the telephone was ringing regularly for Rosa each afternoon, during the time she usually was resting in her room. In the following week, instead of staying in the house until four, after the telephone call she asked permission to leave. At first she said her liver was bothering her, but later she stopped giving excuses. Although he did not much approve of this sort of thing, suspecting she would take advantage of him if he were too liberal in granting favors, he informed her that, until his wife arrived, she might leave at three on two afternoons of the week, provided that all her duties were fully discharged. He knew that everything was done before she left but thought he ought to say it. She listened meekly—her eyes aglow, lips twitching—and meekly agreed. He presumed, when he happened to think about it afterwards, that Rosa had a good spot here, by any standard, and she ought soon to show it in her face, change her unhappy expression for one less so. However, this didn't happen, for when he chanced to observe her, even on days when she was leaving early, she still seemed sadly preoccupied, sighed much, as if something on her heart was weighing her down.

He never asked what, preferring not to become involved in whatever it was. These people had endless troubles, and if you let yourself, you could become endlessly involved. He knew of one woman, the wife of a colleague who had had to say to her maid: "Lucrezia, I am sympathetic to your condition, but I don't want to hear about it." This, the professor reflected, was basically good policy. It kept employer-employee relationships where they belonged —on an objective level. He was, after all, leaving Italy in April and would probably never in his life see Rosa again. It would do her a lot more good if, say, he sent her a small annual check at Christmas, than if he needlessly immersed himself in her miseries now. The professor knew he was nervous and often impatient, and he was

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sometimes sorry for his nature; but he was what he was and preferred to keep himself aloof from what did not closely and personally concern him.

But Rosa would not have it so. One morning she knocked on his study door, and when he said avanti, she went in embarrassedly so that even before she began to speak he was himself embarrassed.

"Professore," Rosa said, unhappily, "please excuse me for bothering your work, but I must speak to somebody."

"I happen to be very busy," he said, growing a little angry. "Can't it wait a while?"

"It will only take a minute. Your troubles stay with you all your life, but it doesn't take long to tell them."

"*Is it your liver complaint?*" he asked.

"No. I need your advice. You are an educated man and I am a peasant."

"What kind of advice?" he asked impatiently.

"Call it whatever you want. The fact is I have to speak to somebody. I can't talk to my son, even if it were possible, in this case. When I open my mouth he roars like a bull; and my daughter-in-law is not worth my breath. Sometimes when we are on the roof, hanging wash, I say a few words to the portinaia, but she is not a sympathetic person, so I have come to you."

Before he could say how he felt about hearing her confidences, Rosa had launched into a story about this middle-aged government worker—in the tax bureau—whom she had met in the neighborhood. He was married, had four children, and sometimes worked as a carpenter after leaving his office at two o'clock each day. His name was Armando; it was he who called her every afternoon. They had met recently on a bus, and he had, after two or three meetings, seeing that her shoes weren't fit to wear, urged her to let him buy her a new pair. She had told him not to be so foolish. One could see that he had very little, and it was enough that he took her to the movies twice a week. She had said that, yet everytime they met he spoke about the shoes he wanted to buy her.

"I am only human," Rosa frankly told the professor, "and I need the shoes badly, but you know how these things go. If I put on his shoes they may carry me to his bed. That's why I thought I would ask you if I ought to take them."

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The professor's face and bald head were flushed. "I don't see how I can possibly advise you—"

"But you are educated," she said.

"However," he went on, "since the situation is still essentially hypothetical, I will go so far as to say you ought to tell this generous gentleman that his responsibilities lie with his own family. He would do well not to offer you gifts, as you will do, not to accept them. If you don't, he can't possibly make any claims upon you or your person. That's all I care to say. Your business is strictly none of mine. Since you have requested advice, I have given it, but I will say no more."

Rosa sighed. "The truth of it is I could use a pair of shoes. Mine look as though they have been chewed by goats. I haven't had a new pair in six years."

But the professor had nothing more to add.

After Rosa had gone for the day, in thinking about her problem, he decided to buy her a pair of shoes. He was concerned that she might have been expecting something of the sort, had planned, so to speak, to have it work out this way. However, since this was conjecture only, evidence entirely lacking, he would assume, until proof to the contrary became available, that she had no ulterior motive in asking his advice. He considered giving her five thousand lire to make the purchase of the shoes herself and relieve him of the trouble, but in this he was doubtful, for there was no guarantee she would use money for the agreed purpose. Suppose she came in the next day, asserting she had had a liver attack that had necessitated calling the doctor, who had charged three thousand lire for his visit; therefore would the professor, in view of these unhappy circumstances, supply another three thousand for the shoes? That would never do; so the next morning, when the maid was at the grocer's, the professor slipped into her room and quickly traced on paper the outline of her miserable shoe—a distasteful task, but he accomplished it quickly. That evening, in a store on the same piazza as the restaurant where he liked to eat, he bought Rosa a pair of brown shoes for fifty-five hundred lire, slightly more than he had planned to spend; but they were a solid pair of ties, walking shoes with a medium heel, a practical gift.

He gave them to Rosa the next day, on a Wednesday. He felt

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a bit embarrassed to be doing so, because he realized that, despite his warnings to himself, he had permitted himself to meddle in her affairs; but he considered giving her the shoes a psychologically good move in more ways than one. In presenting her with them, he said, "Rosa, I have perhaps a solution to suggest in the matter you discussed with me. Here are a pair of new shoes for you. Tell your friend you must refuse his. And when you do, perhaps it would be advisable also to inform him that you intend to see him a little less frequently from now on."

Rosa was overjoyed at the professor's kindness. She attempted to kiss his hand, but he thrust it behind him and retired to his study. On Thursday, when he opened the apartment door to her ring, she was wearing his shoes. She carried a large paper bag from which she offered the professor three small oranges still on a branch with green leaves. He said she needn't have bought them but Rosa, smiling half hiddenly in order not to show her bad teeth, said that she wanted him to see how grateful she was. Later, she requested permission to leave at three so she could show Armando her new shoes.

He said dryly, "You may go at that hour if your work is done."

She thanked him profusely. Hastening through her tasks, she left shortly after three, but not before the professor, in his hat, gloves and bathrobe, nervously standing at his open study door as he was inspecting the corridor floor she had just mopped, saw her hurrying out of the apartment, wearing a pair of dressy black needle-point pumps. This angered him; and when Rosa appeared the next morning, though she begged him not to when he said she had made a fool of him and he was firing her to teach her a lesson, the professor did. She wept and pleaded for another chance, but he would not change his mind. So she desolately wrapped up the odds and ends in her room in a newspaper and left, still crying. Afterwards he was upset and very nervous. He could not stand the cold that day and he could not work.

A week later, on the morning the heat was turned on, Rosa appeared at the apartment door and begged to have her job back. She was distraught, said her son had hit her, and gently touched her puffed, black and blue upper lip. With tears in her eyes, although she did not cry, Rosa said it was no fault of hers that she had accepted both pairs of shoes. Armando had given her his pair first;

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had, out of jealousy, forced her to take them. Then when the professor had kindly offered his shoes, she wanted to refuse them but was afraid of angering him and losing her job. This was God's truth, so help her St. Peter. She would, she promised, find Armando, whom she had not seen in a week, and return his shoes if the professor would take her back. If he didn't, she would throw herself into the Tiber. He, though he did not care for talk of this kind, felt a certain sympathy for her. He was disappointed in himself at the way he had handled her. It would have been better to have said a few appropriate words on the subject of honesty and then philosophically dropped the matter. In firing her he had only made things difficult for them both, because, in the mean time he had tried two other maids and found them impossible. One stole, the other was lazy. As a result the house was a mess, impossible for him to work in, although the portinaia came up for an hour each morning to clean. It was his good fortune that Rosa had appeared at the door just then. When she removed her coat, he noticed with satisfaction that the tear in her dress had finally been sewn.

She went quickly to work, dusting, polishing, cleaning everything in sight. She unmade beds, then made them, swept under them, mopped, polished head and foot boards, adorned the beds with newly pressed spreads. Though she had got her job back and worked with her usual efficiency, she worked, he observed, in sadness, frequently sighing, attempting a smile only when his eye was on her. This is their nature, he thought; they have hard lives. Out of kindness, to spare her further blows by her son, he had given her permission to live in. He offered her extra money to buy meat for her supper, but she refused it, saying pasta would do. Pasta and green salad was all she ate at night. Occasionally she boiled an artichoke left over from lunch. He invited her to drink the white wine in the cupboard and take fruit. Once in a while she did, always telling him what and how much she had taken, though he repeatedly asked her not to. The apartment was beautifully in order. Though the phone rang, as usual, daily at three, only seldom did she leave the house after she had talked with Armando.

Then one dismal morning Rosa came to the professor and in her distraught way confessed she was pregnant. Her face shone in despair; her underwear gleamed through her black dress.

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He reacted with disgust, immediately blaming himself for having reemployed her.

"You must leave at once," he said, trying to keep his voice from trembling.

"I can't," she said. "My son will kill me. In God's name, help me, Professore."

He was infuriated by her stupidity. "Your adventures are none of my responsibility."

"You must help me," she moaned.

"Was it this Armando?" he asked almost savagely.

She nodded.

"Have you informed him?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He says he can't believe it." She tried to smile but couldn't.

"I'll convince him," he said. "Do you have his telephone number?"

She told it to him. He called Armando at his office, identified himself, and asked the government clerk to come at once to the apartment. "You have a grave responsibility to Rosa."

"I have a grave responsibility to my own family," Armando answered quietly.

"You might have considered them before this."

"All right, I will come over tomorrow after work. It is impossible today. I have a carpentering contract to finish."

"She'll expect you," the professor said.

When he hung up he felt less angry, though still more emotional than he cared to feel. "Are you quite sure of your condition?" he asked her, "—that you are pregnant?"

"Yes." She was crying now. "Tomorrow is my son's birthday. What a beautiful present it will be for him to find out his mother is a whore. He will break my bones, if not with his hands, then with his teeth."

"It hardly seems likely that you can conceive, considering your age."

"My mother gave birth at fifty."

"Isn't there a possibility that you are mistaken?"

"I don't know. It's never been this way before. I am a widow and my life is not regular."

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"Well, you had better find out."

"Yes, I want to," Rosa said. "I would see the midwife in my neighborhood but I haven't got a single lira. I spent all I had when I wasn't working, and I had to borrow carfare to get here. Armando can't help me just now. He has to pay for his wife's teeth this week. She has very bad teeth, poor thing. That's why I came to you. Could you advance me two thousand of my pay so I can be examined by the midwife?"

I must make an end to this, he thought. After a minute he counted two one thousand lire notes out of his wallet. "Go to her now," he said. He was about to add that if she was pregnant, not to come back, but he was afraid she might do something desperate, or lie to him so she could go on working. He didn't want her around any more. When he thought of his wife and daughter arriving amidst this mess, he felt sick with nervousness. He wanted to be rid of the maid as soon as possible.

The next day Rosa came in at twelve instead of nine. Her dark face was pallid. "Excuse me for being late," she murmured. "I was praying at my husband's grave."

"That's all right," the professor said. "But did you go to the midwife?"

"Not yet."

"Why not?" Though furious he spoke calmly.

She stared at the floor.

"Please answer my question."

"I was going to tell you I lost the two thousand lire on the bus, but after praying at my husband's grave I will tell you the truth. After all, it's bound to come out."

This is terrible, he thought, simply unending. "What did you do with the money?"

"That's what I mean," Rosa sighed. "I bought my son a present with the money. Not that he deserves it, but it was his birthday . . . ." She burst into tears.

He stared at her a moment, then said, "Please come with me."

The professor left the apartment in his bathrobe, and she followed. Opening the elevator door with his key he stepped inside, holding the door for her. Rosa entered the elevator.

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They stopped two floors below. He got out and nearsightedly scanned the names on the brass plates above the bells. Finding the one he wanted, he pressed the bell. A maid opened the door and let them in. She seemed frightened at Rosa's expression.

"Is the doctor in?" The professor asked the doctor's maid.

"I will see."

"Please ask him if he will see me for a minute. I live in the building, two flights up."

"Si, signore." She glanced again at Rosa, then went inside.

The Italian doctor came out, a short middle-aged man with a beard. The professor had once or twice passed him in the cortile of the apartment house. The doctor was buttoning his shirt cuff.

"I am sorry to trouble you, sir," said the professor. "This is my maid, who has been having difficulty. She is eager to determine whether she is pregnant. Can you assist her?"

The doctor looked at him, then at the maid, who had a handkerchief to her eyes.

"Let her come into my office."

"Thank you," said the professor. The doctor nodded.

The professor went up to his apartment. In a half hour the phone rang.

"Pronto."

It was the doctor. "She is not pregnant," he said, "she is frightened. She also has trouble with her liver."

"Can you be certain, doctor?"

"Yes."

"Thank you," said the professor. "Please send me the bill."

"I will," said the doctor and hung up.

Rosa came into the apartment. "The doctor told you?" the professor said. "You aren't pregnant."

"It's the Virgin's blessing," she said.

"Indeed, you are lucky." Speaking quietly, he told her she would have to go. "I'm sorry, Rosa, but I simply cannot be constantly caught up in this sort of thing. It upsets me so that I can't work."

"I know." She turned her head away.

The door bell rang. It was Armando, a small, thin man in a long gray overcoat. He was wearing a rakish black Borsalino and a

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very thin black mustache. He had dark, worried eyes. He tipped his hat to them.

Rosa told him she was leaving the apartment.

"Then let me help you get your things," Armando said. He escorted her to the maid's room and after whispering a minute they wrapped Rosa's things in newspaper.

When they came out of the room, Armando carrying a shopping bag, Rosa holding a shoe box wrapped in newspaper, the professor handed her the remainder of her month's wages.

"I am sorry," he said again, "but I have my wife and daughter to think of. They'll be here in a few days."

She answered nothing. Armando, smoking a cigarette butt, gently opened the door for her and they left together.

Later the professor inspected the maid's room and saw that Rosa had taken all her belongings but the shoes he had given her. When his wife arrived at the apartment, shortly before Thanksgiving, she gave the shoes to the portinaia, who wore them a week, then gave them to her daughter-in-law.

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Alfred Kazin

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND LITERARY CULTURE TODAY*

I

There is a young Englishman on Broadway who shouts every night that he is angry, very angry. Yet when we open John Osborne's play, *Look Back In Anger,* and try to find out just what he is angry about, we make a curious discovery: he is not angry on specific grounds, as people often are; he is angry at his inability to feel anger, angry that he lacks a cause to be angry about. At one moment, after complaining that "nobody can be bothered. No one can raise themselves out of their delicious sloth," he says, very wistfully indeed for an angry man—"Was I really wrong to believe that there's a—kind of—burning virility of mind and spirit that looks for something as powerful as itself? The heaviest, strongest creatures in this world seem to be the loneliest. Like the old bear, following his own breath in the dark forest. There's no warm pack, no herd to comfort him. That voice that cries out doesn't *have* to be a weakling's, does it?"

This is the truest note in a play which emotionally and artistically seems rather contrived. It is not intensity of feeling but the longing for this intensity that is behind Mr. Osborne's confused and rather forced emotions. And equally, this same pseudo-violence, expressing the dearth rather than the excess of feeling, has struck me in several contemporary literary works that parade an air of militancy and rebelliousness—Norman Mailer's *The Deer Park,* Jack Kerouac's

* Delivered before the Conference on Psychoanalysis and The Image of Man (sponsored by the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, Inc. to honor the seventieth birthday of Theodor Reik), May 18, 1958 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City, and reprinted from *Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Review* Volume 45 No. 1 and No. 2, 1958, through the courtesy of the editors and the publisher, National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, Inc.

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On The Road, Tennessee Williams's *Camino Réal* and other plays, the books of essays that Henry Miller has published from California, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl.* What puts all these works together in my mind is the fact that this essential lack of feeling, of direction and point, is accompanied by the same extreme yet abstract violence of sexual activity and description. I am reminded of the Marquis de Sade, that famous sexual rebel, that supposed martyr to the cause of sexual freedom—when one actually opens his books, he turns out to be not a rebel at all but a fantasist whose idea of sexual pleasure is always something so extreme, perverse and complicated that only the mind can imagine it—as only the mind can stage it. This is the situation in Norman Mailer's *The Deer Park,* a book that was acclaimed by some left-wing critics as an indictment of Hollywood, and is based in part on the enforced exile from the industry of Communist directors and writers who would not give the names of party members to the investigating committees. One discovers very soon in reading his book that Mailer is not interested in the political significance of his material, though he feels that he *should* be; he is concerned with sex as an ultimate expression of man's aloneness. *The Deer Park* takes place mostly in a famous desert resort, and despite the urbanities of luxurious American living, I had the sensation that these people really were in the desert, and with nothing to talk about, nothing to think about, nothing to feel, they were like Eskimos whiling away the eternal boredom of the igloo with unending sexual intercourse.

The sensation of claustrophia, of something profoundly cheerless and inhuman, that I got from Mailer's book was intensified by his article in *Dissent*—"The White Negro: Superficial Reflections On The Hipster." Mailer's theme is that the Negro has been forced by discrimination into an outlaw state in which he has developed the primitive and uninhibited sexuality that white men are not allowed to indulge. As modern capitalist society becomes inwardly more demoralized, certain advanced sectors of white society—the more naturally rebellious, intelligent and unafraid—become white versions of the Negro, seek to become hipsters (spiritual outlaws) rather than "squares" (conventionally conformist men and women). On the model of the Negro, they can find in the sensations of unprecedented orgasm that direct, blazing, ultimate contact with reality of which so many people are deprived by conventional, inhibited middle-class life.

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Anyone with experience in Marxist literature will recognize immediately in this essay the adaptation to the hipster of the myth of the proletariat. Mailer's essay is a completely Marxist-revolutionary essay. Although the characters are the same, their names are different; and although the plot is really the same, too, the real difference is that the play is not on the boards, nothing is really taking place except theoretically. There *was* a proletariat once, and a bourgeoisie; people did suffer from starvation, inhuman hours, physical violence. But Mailer's picture of the Negro and of his revolutionary, unprecedented orgasms gives even the interested and sympathetic reader the sense that all this is being relayed to him from far away, for it is all a mental construction. Nothing here is taken from the real life of struggle, from life as actual conflict; it is an attempt to impose a dramatic and even noble significance on events that have not genuinely brought it forth. So desperate is Mailer for something to be revolutionary about, as Osborne is, that after telling us contemptuously that modern psychoanalysis merely softens the patient up by adapting him to modern middle-class society, he says that by contrast, two strong eighteen-year old hoodlums beating in the brains of a candy-store keeper do have courage of a sort, "for one murders not only a weak fifty-old year man but an institution as well, one violates private property, one enters into a new relation with the police and introduces a dangerous element into one's life. The hoodlum is therefore daring the unknown, and so no matter how brutal the act, it is not altogether cowardly."

Jack Kerouac is a far less gifted and intelligent writer than Mailer but in his recent best seller, *On The Road,* one finds this same loneliness of emotions without objects to feel them about, this same uprush of verbal violence which, when one looks at it a little closely, seems to be unnaturally removed from the object or occasion. Kerouac, indeed, writes not so much *about* things as about the search for things to write about. When he celebrates the "kick" of ecstasy brought about by drink, drugs and jazz, it is the relief of having so strong a sensation that impresses him, not his communion with some object in ecstatic relatedness. And it is significant that his highest praise is for "the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn,

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burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you can see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes 'Aww!' "

Though it may seem a far step from the raucous and self-advertising propaganda of Kerouac's bohemian group to the professional theater world of Tennessee Williams, the very subject of Williams's plays is always this same loneliness. When Williams, minus the stage lights and hocus-pocus of his director, is read for himself, as in his execrable fiction, *The Roman Spring Of Mrs. Stone* and the stories collected in *One Arm,* one discovers that his subject is not merely the fantasy world of the utterly lonely, but that in fantasy even the sexual fulfillment of his characters has a brutal and mechanical quality, as if one mental category dully followed another without any stimulus or color from direct experience. In the title story of *One Arm,* a Negro masseur not merely violates his white patient, but literally butchers him; this same hellish oppression of sexual fantasy, like a nightmare from which the dreamer may never escape into the unpatterned relief of the real world, dogs us in some of the more violent stories of Carson McCullers, in the most recent novel by Nelson Algren, *A Walk On The Wild Side,* and in the last section of Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky,* where a young American wife, maddened after her husband dies in the desert, is captured by an Arab and added to his harem.

I wish I could describe some of these new novels and plays in greater detail, for what is most striking about so many of them is the fact that despite the surface sexual violence, they seem little concerned with sex itself, with the *physicality* of sex; in many of these books there are simply not enough people about, in actual human relation of any sort, for sexual activity to take place. On the contrary, many of the newer writers use sex exactly as a drunken and confused man uses profanity—as a way of expressing anger, irritation, exasperation, and thus of breaking through the numbing despair of isolation. And indeed, isolation of the most crippling and stupefying sort, the kind of isolation that makes it impossible to break the lockstep of one's thoughts, the isolation that imagines anything because it has contact with nothing, but which, in the imagination of loneliness, cannot give us the color, the tactile feel of anything, only the abstract category to which the experience belongs, is the really significant experience behind this literature.

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Yet this loneliness does not call itself that; it calls itself revolutionary. In a long and now celebrated American poem simply called *Howl,* the young poet Allen Ginsberg has taken Whitman's long line and has described an hallucinated tour of America that reverses Whitman's celebration and becomes an exultant nightmare of denunciation:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,
who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,
. . . . . .
who cowered in unshaven rooms in their underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,
who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a belt of marijuana for New York. . . .

Now this abstractness contrasts very sharply with the lyric and sensuous imagery with which sexual desire or activity used to be described by writers who were famous for their prophetic, unconventional concern with the subject. I have not the space to spell out in its required and fascinating detail the kind of imagery which one finds in Whitman's "Out Of The Cradle Endlessly Rocking," in the love scenes of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons And Lovers,* in the glorious pages of Colette, who could portray sex as the union not only of man and woman but of man and the whole physical world of earth sounds and earth smells, of colors and nuances; in those pages of Proust where, despite the pain of Swann's jealousy of Odette, one feels the gasping sharpness of real desire and the excitement of the great city that is its background and stimulus. Perhaps I have made

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it too easy for myself by contrasting so many classically sensuous writers with American writers who have never had the same tradition of art as the celebration of the natural world. But as Albert Camus confessed in his recent Nobel Prize speech, even someone brought up in the pagan and sunlit world of North Africa finds himself unable to describe the sensuous joy of life as he once did. As man increasingly loses his connection with the world, the great world, the only world, he finds himself playing the moralist and the revolutionary as part of the same imposture—the purpose of which is to perform *some* action, to see oneself performing any role.

II

Much of the fiction and poetry I have been describing has been influenced by the theories of Wilhelm Reich, and in the terms in which I have been describing them, illustrates the use of psychoanalytical terminology for the sake of an utterly hypothetical rebelliousness, in which a gangster beating out the brains of an old storekeeper is seen in the ritual of a revolutionary terrorist destroying the old order. Turn to the enormously fashionable and influential literary criticism written under the inspiration of Dr. Jung, and you find in academic and philosophical circles the use of psychoanalysis not as socialism but as religion. In a recent effort to summarize the Jungian conception of literature—the book takes its very title from the loneliest character in American literature, Melville's Ishmael—James Baird explains that what orthodox Christians regard as sacrament is really a symbol, and that since art itself deals with symbols, art itself may be viewed as a religious ritual. To anyone who has followed the development of literary criticism since the vogue of neo-orthodoxy began with Eliot, this is old stuff; phrases like symbol, symbolic action, ritual, myth, are the mainstay of fashionable academic criticism. But the themes I have been stressing in this paper—isolation and forced rebelliousness—are paralleled in the pseudo-metaphysics of the following. For just as art is really a religious ritual, so religion is really art; sacrament, says Mr. Baird, is symbol "representing corporateness in which the individual is subsumed, and ultimately these new compensatory symbols transcend the artist in the collective of the archetype."

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The abstraction of his created form as sacrament singularly envisions the corporateness of man in a religious act . . . Each man worships alone on his island. The sacrament which he creates invokes for his comfort and his 'salvation' a world of the ideal where what he remembers of lost symbols is mixed with what his heretical allegiance to non-Christian (Oriental) custom supplies. Whether this custom, displayed to him through the aperture of his Oriental journey as experience, was mastered or merely 'sampled' cannot very much matter. His symbol suggests the possibility of a new sacramental corporateness. As a maker of sacramentalism he belongs to an unconscious artistic community of his age because, as artist, he is like other workers who find art a better means of affirmation than existential courage. He has cast off convention and traditional theology, and in his act of creating, he descends to the true primitivity of religiousness; he returns to the authority of primitive feeling and the emotive life.

There is not a phrase here which refers to anything real; neither art nor religion, neither the so-called primitive feeling nor the emotive life, means anything in this context. But Mr. Baird is not bogus: he is not pretending that he believes in God; he is pretending that out of something which is not religion, religion may come again, so that human beings who have lost the traditional objects of their belief, but not the habit of belief, may have something to believe in again. Just as the Reichians want to believe in Socialism again, because they don't, so the Jungians write as if religion could be had back for the asking. It is all so easy, so fatally easy—this socialism that carefully avoids society; this religion that dares not say that God exists. It is easy because everything is based on what the self wants, what the self needs or thinks it needs, and nothing on what the world is really like. The world—the surrounding and not always friendly reality of nature, history, society—has disappeared for these writers, and has taken with it everything which has given measure and definition to man's struggles in the world, everything which has given man a sense of his possibilities and his limits, of his guilt as well as his desire, of his tragedy as well as his happiness. These writers are not concerned with winning over nature, with forcing it to yield up its secrets; they are searching for a world they can believe in again, and get angry at again. They are tormented not by the pains of heroism, but by the inability to feel heroic—and often by the ina-

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bility to feel anything. The human catastrophes visited upon our generation by totalitarianism seem too great to understand, to describe, to cope with. History has become meaningless to them, and private life a search for sensations—either of unprecedented orgasm or of God—that may make them feel real to themselves.

This pervasive sense of unreality is authentic, and as usual, the writers—those whom Ezra Pound saluted as the "antennae of the race"—see ahead of everyone else. For the middle-class world which all of us have depended on so long has itself, as a value system, ceased to exert any real authority, to arouse real respect. The sense of unreality that I have been describing arises naturally out of the bewilderment of people who recognize that history has taken still another turn, and that the solid middle-class virtues on which so many of us depended, so that we could meaningfully oppose them, are no longer believed in seriously enough for opposition to mean anything. The real tragedy of our time, as Nietzsche correctly foresaw, is a nihilism so total, so pervasive, so defeatist even in the midst of the greatest luxury the world has ever known, that it is no wonder that unimaginative people try to turn back the clock of modern science, to blame Marx and Darwin and Freud for robbing us of the illusion of our omnipotence in the universe. These people are hopeless, yet there is one element of tragic truth in their indictment of the modern spirit: more and more people lack the sense of tradition with which to assimilate the endless shocks and changes of the twentieth century. Just as Marx could not anticipate heirs who would completely lack his culture and tradition, who in the name of his great insights into capitalist society would create a society far more tyrannical and unjust, so Freud, himself so rooted in the Hebraic tradition, the English tradition, the nineteenth-century tradition, the scientific tradition, could not have predicted the destruction of Western civilization at Auschwitz, Maidenek, Belsen. He could not have imagined a psychoanalytically oriented psychiatry divorced from the humanistic and moral tradition, a psychiatry that would be used for market research in consumer motivation and even for the manipulation back to "normal" of political deviants. Psychoanalysis has depended so much on the intellectual and literary tradition out of which it arose, and of which it is an essential part, that now that this tradition of cultivation and intellectual freedom no longer commands

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allegiance as it used to, one sees an increasing divergence between writers, who are concerned with the tradition itself, and therefore with Freud's classic insights, and those psychoanalysts who, lacking the needed cultural reference, foolishly and self-indulgently suppose that they are living in the same world of bourgeois morality which made Freud grasp the necessary reactions of repression, guilt and shame. In the last few years, the kind of psychoanalytical comment on literary works which used to be so arresting and valuable has come to seem a wholly mechanical jargon. Significantly, it has become the staple of the most pedantic and academic research, unrelated to living literature; for as with all things academic, this perspective is based on admiration of the static, the enclosed, on the literary tradition that neatly folds itself up and files itself away.

Equally, the use of psychoanalysis as a kind of pampering to merely bourgeois tastes and self-delusions, to the lap-dog psychology of Americans whose only problem is to reduce and to save on income tax, is in itself a literary scandal. In this connection I would point to several things. One: the myth of universal "creativity," the assumption that every idle housewife was meant to be a painter and that every sexual deviant is really a poet. From this follows the myth that these unproductive people are "blocked"; whereupon how easy for the hack and the quack to get together! Second: the use of psychoanalytical jargon as a static description of the personality of the artist. There is no doubt that although neurosis can cripple creative artistry or hinder it entirely, talent is always quite separate in function—if not in theme—from the emotional chaos of neurosis, which provides no clue whatever to the reality of creative life. But perhaps the theme I have been stressing in this paper—the contemporary use of psychoanalysis in order to find identity rather than freedom—is seen here, too, since the more unreal people become to us, the more we try to pin them down with a descriptive formula, usually gained these days from psychoanalysis. If we approach literature exclusively by way of the writer's personality, psychoanalytically considered, we not only get even farther away from the real experience of literature than we were before, but we obliterate even the fundamental cultural respect for the health of the creative self in our eagerness to label the writer ill.

A recent example of this is the introduction by Mrs. Diana

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Trilling to a new selection of the letters of D. H. Lawrence. Mrs. Trilling confesses that Lawrence no longer means as much to her as he did in rebellious youth, and one believes her, since her analysis of Lawrence's work is based not on his real and marvelous creativity, but on an Oedipal conflict which she insists is the root of his ultimate failure as a novelist. More than one great poet, or poetic talent, has known the same kind of failure, which is probably rooted in the gap between the poetic realization of reality, which is always fundamentally "personal," and the kind of novelistic instinct which specializes in *story*—an instinct that Lawrence never really had. But instead of paying the homage to him that his genius deserves—and calls for—homage that would at least see Lawrence as possessing the defects of his genius, Mrs. Trilling regales us with the kind of clinical hindsight which, divorced from literary humility and appreciation, has made this kind of writing a terror to anyone who simply cares for literature.

I think it was this institutionalized conjunction of sex and love that threw Lawrence into the despair of the war years. The conflict raging in the world was an externalized expression of the private sexual struggle which was to absorb so large a part of his emotional energies for the rest of his life.

This is no irrelevant private point I'm making, no psychoanalytical advantage I'm trying to take of Lawrence, need I make that clear? The conflict which was crystallized in Lawrence when he and Frieda finally married seems to me to be the essential conflict, and contradiction, that runs through all his work.

This may not be an irrelevant private point, but it shows an attitude toward literature which has nothing to claim for literature itself. It is odd that the very people who are so quick to see suppressed and wasted creativity in people who are merely emotionally ill should always wish to deny the fundamental creativity of the greatest writers, like Kafka and Lawrence and Dostoevsky—a mistake that in the case of the latter, Freud pointedly refrained from making. Yet the reason for this relentless psychologizing of art, so often equally irrelevant to both art and psychology, is that it gives the analyst, whoever he may be, the chance to share in the creativity of his subject. There is a sad perversion here of what, in genuine literary criticism, *is* an act of appropriation. Henry James said that the true critic is

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so much in love with art that he tries to "possess" it—to include it in his personal experience, which means to increase his power of enjoyment and understanding, and thereby of instruction to others. But as Ernst Kris has pointed out, the rise of a wholly "esthetic" attitude toward life—I should call it pseudo-esthetic in effect—is an attempt to appropriate not the work of art itself, which does exist so that we may possess it, but the artist himself. It exists so as to give us "status" and "prestige" in a world where the old bourgeois claims of money and social position, though they support the life of art, are felt not to be as real in advancing one's prestige as creativity itself. And the myth of creativity, the endless search for it in modern times, is simply a search for identity on the part of people who believe that they can find it in an experience, that of the real creator, utterly foreign to themselves.

I could go on here to speak of many related aspects; of "taste," of corruption, of the demonstrable fact that while psychoanalysis has added nothing to the creation of art, it has added a great deal, perhaps too much, to our modern concern with art. But in conclusion it is more important to note that the most signal fact about our experience today is that it is utterly unprecedented. The protagonist of middle-class literature, from Goethe to Thomas Mann, from Blake to D. H. Lawrence, from Rousseau to Proust, naturally saw life as a struggle against convention. Under the slogan of nature as freedom and truth, man saw himself as a hero reuniting man to the natural destiny of which he had been robbed by the gods. If there had been no profound tradition of repression, no moral code to bind us, Don Juan could never have been a hero or Anna Karenina a heroine; there would have been no guilt to suffer and no rebellion to honor. But the great human symbol of contemporary literature, I suggest, is no longer the rebel, since there is no authoritative moral tradition that he can honestly feel limits and hinders his humanity. It is the stranger—who seeks not to destroy the moral order, but to create one that will give back to him the idea of humanity.

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POEMS

THE CONCLUSION

September 1, 1957

I

How slow time moves when torment stops the clock,
How dormant and delinquent, under the dawn,
The uproarious roaring of the bursting cock:
Now pain ticks on, now all and nothing must be borne,
And I remember: pain is the cost of being born.

II

For when the fires of infatuation fade
The furs which love in all its warmth discloses
Become the fires of pride and are betrayed
By those whom love has terrified and pride has made afraid.
No matter what time prepares, no matter how time amazes
The images by which we live or die,
Pride is not love and pride is merely pride
Until pride is or pride becomes a living death which denies
How it is treacherous and faithless, how it betrays,
Everyone, one by one, and every vow,
Seeking praise absolute, the praise of every gaze,
A fame which has never been, and even now
Flees to the brothels, hides with other whores
Whom pride and time seduces and love ignores.

III

This will be true long after heart and heart
Have recognized and forgotten all that was ripening, ripe, rotten-ripe and rotten,
Have known too soon, too soon by far, how much of love has been forgotten:
Have known the little deaths before death do us part:

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Nothing will ever pass at last to nothingness beyond decay
Until the night is all, or night is known all day.

Delmore Schwartz

THE SOWING

By early fall it will stand up tall and lithe
Though now you could work it loose from the early spring
Settling into the field under the flung
Soil that will keep it secret and alive.

Anything like a seed will almost leap
Out of this good black loam. Well, we have sown
Anything here (recurrently hoping for
The hovering beak, the rock, the sudden thorn).

Passively then, toward shocks the fall will store,
Earth takes the urgent thrust and something burrows
Into the deep promiscuous darkness where
The teeth of worn-out dragons are as fertile
As young Adonis down the dark aisle gliding—
Something that knows the private shapes for budding
Out of these noncommittal these anonymous furrows.

Virginia Berry

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Sidney Hook

TWO TYPES OF EXISTENTIALIST RELIGION AND ETHICS*

It is commonly assumed that religion and morality reinforce each other's claims and that despite differences in emphasis they express a common outlook which assigns man an intelligible place in an ordered world. Historically the connection between religion and ethics has always been intimate. It is possible, of course, to define religion in such a way that every strong ethical or unethical position is religious and the distinction between the religious and ethical categories disappears. Little is to be gained by such procedure. It does violence to the actual historical materials. Further, the differences between ethics and religion reappear in the recognized differences among religions.

In this paper I wish to call attention to two types of existentialist religious thinking in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which point up the difference between the attitude of faith—which I regard as strictly religious, and the attitude of morality which I regard as primarily secular.

By the two types of existentialist religion I mean the types of religious thinking represented by Soren Kierkegaard and Ludwig Feuerbach. The first is oriented towards some transcendental element which conditions the whole of human experience; the second regards human experience as the matrix of all religion. Although in polar opposition to each other, both were critical reactions to the idealistic pan-logism of Hegel, for whom religion was nothing but an aesthetic or symbolic rendition of the truths discovered by philosophy. Kierkegaard has become the most influential philosopher of religion of

* Presented at the Ninth International Congress for the History of Religions at Tokyo, Japan, August 27, 1958.

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the Western world in our time; Feuerbach still awaits his proper recognition.

Kierkegaard is an existentialist who takes his point of departure from man's subjective experience, supposedly universal, of incompleteness, insufficiency, and despair, "an anxious dread of an unknown something." On the basis of this and similar subjective experiences Kierkegaard postulates, he cannot rationally establish the existence beyond an "infinite yawning abyss" of an objective Absolute, completely transcendent to man and therefore essentially unknowable and mysterious. In the words of Karl Barth, a lineal theological descendant of Kierkegaard, God is "wholly other than man."

Feuerbach is an even more radical existentialist than Kierkegaard. He interprets man's religious beliefs as projections of human needs and care. They are either ideal liberations from his most pressing concerns or, when they express longings, ideal fulfillments. For him "the secret of theology is anthropology." This is meant in two senses: the first as a heuristic principle in the study of comparative religion; second, and more important, as a naturalistic interpretation in cultural and psychological terms of belief in the supernatural. "Religion is the dream of the human mind. But even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality."

The school of existential theism from Kierkegaard to Barth recognizes the fact that Man's nature is expressed in his religious beliefs. It places, however, an altogether different interpretation from that of Feuerbach upon this fact. It dismisses the Feuerbachian approach as a stupendous but dangerous commonplace; a commonplace because everything man does and thinks bears witness to his faltering mortality; a dangerous commonplace because unless disciplined by the humble realization that the conceptions of finite, wicked and mortal creatures violently distort the nature of God, they inescapably lead to idolatry, in which the part is worshipped as the whole, and man impiously confused with God. Indeed some modern followers of Kierkegaard regard Feuerbach's existential humanism as a *reductio ad absurdum* of any interpretation which takes its point of departure from the facts of religious experience alone independently of its ontological correlative.

The Kierkegaardian point of view is correct in pointing out that

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there is an inescapable reference to man in all his works, from art to astronomy and religion. The fact that astronomy is a human enterprise does not preclude our achieving objective knowledge of the behavior of heavenly bodies. But certainly this element of subjectivity is not a sufficient condition of knowledge, else there would be no difference between veridical and hallucinatory experience on any level. The only way objectivity can be established on the basis of human experience is by empirical evidence and/or reasoning, both of which are rejected out of hand by the existentialists of this school. This leaves the only way open to them the unmediated "leap" of faith, the reliance upon "paradox, inaccessible to thought," the glorification of "the absurd," the refusal to apply any categories of reason or logic to "the revealed." Since it disdains human reason, not in the light of a higher Reason, for this, too, is infected with man's imperfect nature, it is impervious to rational criticism. Nonetheless it is not beyond the reach of psychological analysis and social criticism.

The existentialism of Feuerbach denies that human projection in religion distorts "reality" because projections are not literal reports of antecedent existence but a mode of experiencing things. For something to be distorted requires that it have a normal or natural appearance. But if all appearances are essentially related to the finite eye and mind of men, it makes no sense to counterpose what human beings experience to some allegedly objective transcendent entity. The eternal can only be grasped in a temporal frame. The "absurd" for Feuerbach always consists in the negation of human sense and understanding and is therefore rejected by him as a negation of the true nature of religion as he conceives it.

Of the two thinkers, it is apparent that although Feuerbach's development took him further away from the Hegelian philosophy of religion than did Kierkegaard, the latter made the more radical break with the Hegelian tradition of reason and the systematic unity of the concrete universal. Feuerbach is closer to Hegel because like Hegel he rejects all dualisms, epistemological, metaphysical or theological. For Hegel, Spirit, divine or human, is one, and it develops by alienating itself into objective forms which become both temporary obstacles and stimuli to its further advance. Feuerbach interprets the process of human alienation as consisting in this unconscious worship of its

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own projections. He naturalizes and demythologizes the Absolute Spirit of Hegel. He reinterprets the different stages in the progressive development of the Idea or Absolute or God as a succession of different *historical* expressions of the human species or essence. "Man—this is the mystery of religion—projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject . . ." Feuerbach's attitude towards religion is reverential and sensitive. He believes that it is an irreducible aspect of human experience no matter how profoundly its images, symbols and dogmas change. "What yesterday was still religion, is no longer such today: and what today is atheism, tomorrow will be religion."

The profoundest difference between the approach of existential theism and that of existential humanism to religion is in their conceptions of ethics and morality. Existential humanism, especially in its post-Feuerbachian developments, sees man's moral vocation in redoing, remaking, reforming the world and self in the light of consciously held ethical ideals to which religious myths and rituals can give only emotional and aesthetic support. Existential theism, aware of human finitude and weakness and self-idolatry, places the greatest emphasis upon the acceptance of the world and its underlying plan, so unclear to human eyes, upon the explanation and justification of evil rather than on the duty of eliminating specific evils. This is sometimes obscured by the fact that the transcendant and Absolute God of existential theism is considered to be *beyond* good and evil. Psychologically it is apparent that the belief that the difference between human good and human evil disappears in the light of the Absolute, or that what appears good or evil in the sight of Man may be quite different in the sight of the Lord, cannot serve as a premise for the active transformation of the world. In effect, it accepts the existing order of things, whatever it is, as a basis of preparation for salvation either by a leap of faith or a transformation of self.

This is brilliantly illustrated in Kierkegaard's remarkable analysis of the Abraham-Isaac story in his *Fear and Trembling*. According to Kierkegaard, God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his only and dearly beloved son, Isaac, to Him as a burnt-offering ran counter to one of the highest ethical principles. The test of Abraham's religious faith was his willingness to violate his duty as a father, hus-

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band, citizen and compassionate human being in order to carry out his absolute duty to God. This "teleological suspension of the ethical" raises Abraham in Kierkegaard's eyes above tragic heroes like Agamemnon, Jeptha, and Brutus who sacrificed their children to the common good. They were "tragic heroes," exalting the universal over the particular. Abraham is no tragic hero. He must be regarded, says Kierkegaard, as either "a murderer," from the ethical standpoint, or a true "believer" from the standpoint of absolute religion. Kierkegaard's account is powerful and honest. He admits that Abraham "acts by virtue of the absurd" and that although in ethics it is wrong to subordinate the universal to the particular, in the case of one's absolute duty to God "the particular is higher than the universal." In serving God one is beyond good and evil. "Hence it is," writes Kierkegaard, "that I can understand the tragic hero but cannot understand Abraham, though in a certain crazy sense I admire him more than all other men."

We can use this parable to point up the difference between the approaches of Kierkegaard and Feuerbach. The latter would interpret the story quite differently. First, he would maintain that despite Kierkegaard there is no escaping the standpoint of morality, that we are all responsible for our judgments, and for the consequences of our judgments, no matter what we believe the external source of our moral duty to be. Here the Feuerbachian view follows the Kantian view. When Abraham, knife in hand, prepared to sacrifice Isaac, the Biblical account says an Angel of the Lord commanded him to stay his hand. How did Abraham know that this message was a message from the Lord and not from Satan, or that it was not the voice of his own longing, the expression of the anguished wish of a loving father not to be bereaved of a son? The existential humanist answers that Abraham attributes the source of this command to God, not to Satan, because it is he who finds it good. Every statement which asserts that the Good is what God commands presupposes that we already have independent knowledge of what is good or bad in order to attribute the good to God and the bad to Satan. The command from the Angel of the Lord represents the birth of a new moral insight in man, in Abraham according to which it is not necessary to sacrifice human life in thanksgiving to, or in fear of, the imputed author of creation. The earlier injunction to sacrifice Isaac undoubtedly reflected a local religious practice.

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Certainly, *after* the Abraham-Isaac episode even Kierkegaard would judge a man willing to sacrifice his son or any other human being on the altar of the Gods, by a different standard. Abraham's resolution to carry out the first Divine Command can be justified only because he knows or believes it is a Divine Command and only because he knows or believes that the Divine Command is the source of good. Feuerbach believed, I think truly, that men create God in their own moral image, that morality is autonomous of religion, and that although religious beliefs and symbols may support moral values the latter can never be derived from the former. Where this is denied or overlooked then the status quo in all its infamy is either accepted in terms of a disguised value judgment or it is ignored as something irrelevant to man's profoundest concern.

It is of course true that even an immanent theology can adopt a morality which leads, as in the Hegelian system, to the belief that whatever is, is right. (*Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.*) Such an identification receives a well-merited rebuke from existential theism on the ground that it results in an idolatry of history, especially when, as in Hegel, the path of history is interpreted as the path of divinity. The great paradox of existentialist theism is that it properly perceives the finitude of all human standpoints, the relativity of all philosophical absolutes, but fails to see that a finite creature can criticize the finite only in the light of another finite, the relative (or relational) only from the basis of another relative (or relational) position.

The question remains whether existential humanism is also another form of idolatry. If ethical ideals are related to human interests is not man's pursuit of the good a worship of his own nature? There is no doubt that sometimes this is the case. But it need not be. Men, by projecting their ideals as standards, may appeal from an existing self to a developing self, from what things and men actually are to what they may possibly be or become. They may criticize the structure of the self from the standpoint of shared interests with others, which forms the basis of community. Time guarantees that whatever the world is or may be, new visions of human excellence, whether in conflict or cooperation, will prevent men from identifying their limitations with the limitations of all human possibility.

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Kathleen Nott

NOTES ON FEELING AND IDEOLOGY

A character in Rose Macaulay's novel *The Towers of Trebizond* complains that nowadays nobody wants to be good. Speaking as one who grew up in the great Age of Ideology, I can affirm that in the '20s and '30s, on the other hand, a very large number of people passionately aspired to be good: almost everybody, in fact, who ratiocinated. We were obsessed with moral anxiety, with a guilty regard for our fellow human beings, and it was through this moral compulsion that the various ideologies worked. If more people had been able to realize that this is the way ideologies have always worked, the world might have been saved a good deal of trouble. I do not feel so sure as Rose Macaulay that nowadays nobody wants to be good; I suspect that the ideologies have merely spent their influence—for the time. If the anger of the young were nothing but anger, I should regard it as a healthy sign; but more likely the anger is combined with anxiety: they are fidgeting around for a new ideology to rationalize it.

When growing up I myself naturally sniffed at the various ideologies on offer. But as I see now—and in my opinion even more naturally—I did not really want to be good. Even at the age of seventeen or eighteen I was dimly aware of radical human ambivalence—I felt good and bad. (I use this "scientific" term simply to place on record my recognition of a psychological fact, something which a human being cannot be argued, persuaded or exorcised out of.) As policy, I put this to myself in the form that one should never be *nice* to people; and by this I meant that it was a mistake to let yourself feel any compulsion to like them or their ideas, if in fact you did not. I knew that feelings are not subject to command, and that it is not sensible to exhort either oneself or anyone else to be loving. This may seem obvious to some people. I can only say that I myself was wiser then than I have so far been since. *Si vieillesse* savait, *si jeunesse* pouvait. And the moral anxiety which I developed with the years (and am somewhat losing) was due to my deserting this insight, not really at all to my failure to be good.

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I wonder whether after all the author of *The Towers of Trebizond* does not mean *nice* rather than good? She personally subscribes, I believe, to a kind of liberalism and a kind of Christianity which have not, in either case, the exclusiveness and finality of a system. They are "way of life" rather than ideology. They belong to a special and intimate tradition of family and friendship, a Liberalism Whiggish rather than Jacobin, a Christianity which is humanistic after the personal relations ideal of the Bloomsbury Group. These people were too well-bred to include you by blandishments or to exclude you with threats. In an inevitable reaction, they have been adequately cursed for their aestheticism, their drawing room detachment and even downright ladylikeness. I think they were no worse than most and better than some. They had some very civilized ideas about the kind of sympathetic contact which could be made between two or more persons who saw each other often, or had even decided to spend their lives together. But they also had an illusion that a "world" like theirs in which "everyone" knew "everyone" else, was rather like the Greek city-state. Perhaps it was—and that was the danger: it was more exclusive than they knew and in the same sort of way; it shut out ordinary people and angry passions from consciousness. Freud was one of their textbooks, but they were not necessarily able to recognize that as human beings they were not always "nice." (And the fact that Freud preached a doctrine of ambivalence does not by any means show that he was able to take it to himself—which goes for all of us, including myself.) The Group, however, were not ideologues; they spent very little time in telling other people what they ought to be like. But even now the still sad music of such "Humanities" as theirs cannot be heard for the ideologies, the watertight systems, on one side or the other, which organized the major part of intellectual life in Britain, as elsewhere, between the wars.

Ideologies have common characteristics which distinguish them from what I should like to call philosophy. They are all based somewhere on an assumption that human ambivalence is a mistake and ought to be cured. They all also assume that people can be argued out of this radical paradox of feeling, that sometimes one likes people and sometimes one dislikes them—the same people. All the ideologies assume that there must be some people one always wants to be with, either in mind or body or both, and that they provide the very people you want: it is only a question of realization. Since the opposition, the paradox, is a natural fact, the ideologies are all obliged to obliterate it by rationalizing and projecting it; this works out as telling you that there are some beings who are totally bad, you don't want them at all: the role of the Devil. And so ideologies manifest themselves as exclusive

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systems of psychology and ethics, telling you what human nature is like and what it ought to be like, and devising a hard-and-fast division of sheep and goats—with sanctions for being a goat. And the definition of good and bad is backed by the claim to be able to prove that it is Right to be Good and Wrong to be Bad.

A genuine and natural humanist to my mind would be a person who thought that human beings have it in them to work out a reasonably happy way of living on this planet; that means recognizing both their gifts and their limitations and so finding out what is possible for them as individual people. But most people who call themselves humanists spend their lives trying ideologies and finding them wanting. They too are often anxious and guilty because they do not love actual human beings all the time or as much as they love Humanity; they hunger and thirst after Righteousness, they miserably want to be Good.

In practice, all the ideologies tell us that we are miserable sinners with no health in us unless we join their side. Among those which, in the '30s, asked for both our money *and* our life, the systems of Marx and Freud were pre-eminent. It was difficult not to join one or the other and some people tried to belong to both, and no doubt some patients of these rival treatments for social guilt contracted schizophrenia.

That browbeating is aimed at breast beating, that what looks like the appeal to reason is really the appeal to the sense of sin, and is thus no more and no less cogent than blackballing at a club, is perhaps more obvious in the case of Marxism than of Freudianism. The first of these ideologies is mainly concerned with social guilt, the other with neurotic guilt. Both are systems of diagnosis and treatment, but hardly cure, for it appears that both of them aim at canalizing and making use of the guilt rather than alleviating it.

All Marxist intellectuals who have resigned from the bourgeoisie want, or are supposed to want, to be at least honorary members of the working class or even to be completely merged; in fact to be born anew. This last they can never achieve either unaided, or even by special grace from Lenin or Stalin; their bourgeois conditioning has left them with an ineradicable taint of Original Sin. And so the moral anxiety remains; the benefits of the therapy are only leasehold, they are never yours outright. Similarly with Freudianism. I single out psychoanalysis because during the period to which I am referring it was more influential than any of the other systems, its ideological effect was more marked; although all the systems proposed some sort of objective norm in which you had better enroll, I do not remember meeting any psychotherapist of any school who was able to state his theory tenta-

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tively. And yet if the physicist's head gets in his own light when he is looking at the electron, how much more true this must be of psychological theorizing, apart from the fact that there can not even yet be data good enough for empirical backing to any firm psychological theory. In the name of freedom from excessive social control of instinct, Freudianism itself invented a new sexual conformity; its assertion of pan-sexuality in fact increased the general sense of sexual inadequacy (or anxiety at falling below the standard or *mores*). The new conformity, moreover, was doubly artificial because Freud undoubtedly confused sexuality and masculinity. Women may be vague about what goes on in their own minds but Freud, in being so very definite, was far more misleading. It is very difficult for man or woman to experience the processes of thought and feeling which have become habitual to the opposite sex and are therefore considered to be typical of it. But the most important reason for this may be that it is difficult to be able to express what one thinks or feels at all, whether one is man or woman. Good novelists and poets still do better than most people, including the psychologists; but even novelists and poets only express *themselves* and, so far as the opposite sex is concerned, proceed largely by projection, and of course by observation, which is behavioristic and inevitably conventional to some extent, evading the question of an inner life. And most artists have been men anyway and have invented and re-invented women for the world and for themselves, without consultation. Artistically women have been less articulate and their education has often encouraged them to reticence and duplicity. It is not surprising that with so little to go on in the way of honest and unaided documents, Freud should have left the "thinking" female of my generation with an odd picture of herself. In fact he often induced in women a double guilt: that as civilized human beings they were sexually substandard anyway and, since sex was phallic, that they were only second-class males. (Adler's *masculine* protest is really the same thing.)

This may sound unfair: as if I were attributing the garbled notions of the newspapers and of the unanalyzed to the founder of psychoanalysis. But surely the enormous importance given by Freud to the castration complex is a sign of his inability to think in any but masculine terms, that is, lop-sidedly. Simone de Beauvoir and others have produced good evidence that a more common female preoccupation is fear of penetration, of *damage* in general, which may or may not be directly sexual.

These Freudian mechanisms are very mechanistic. The dominant ideologies of our time which claim to tell us about the nature of human

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beings all suffer from excessive materialism and false objectivity, whereas subjectivity, individuality, the world of inner feeling—for only individuals *feel*—still clamor to be understood; and, for precision, this requires an individual, an artistic or poetical language. The language of the ideologies reveals this false objectivity by setting far too soon into technicality. It is striking how soon the sense of the numinous is aroused in those who have got inside any enclosure, how soon aroused and how irritably; we know how easily those who are inside either the Marxian or the Freudian pales are exasperated by the levity which their terminology arouses in the illiterati of their disciplines. I have an idea that this levity might in some cases be no mere "resistance," that, on the contrary, it might be based on a sound instinct for detecting jargon. For jargon is a parrotlike or mumbo jumbo imitation of the precise classifications of the physical and mathematical sciences. A language is a jargon when its references claim an objectivity, an agreement about definition that does not exist. The ideologies of the '20s and '30s, the formative period of my generation, were false and dangerous because they falsely claimed this scientific status.

We have often been told that the chief characteristic of science proper is that it makes exact predictions, and that the social sciences as well as what I call the ideologies are not sciences, because human behavior cannot be the subject of exact prediction. I should say myself that an ideology differs from a science—as well as from any branch of artistic expression whether literary or otherwise—in being a propagandist ethic. I must make some provisos here. All human activity is ethical, for everything from living to theorizing about living is based on evaluation and choice: doing this thing rather than that, with reasons for your choice which may or may not be explicit. In this evaluative sense, scientific thinking is ethical too: while those kinds of philosophizing, among the most influential in recent decades, which have made what they regard as scientific procedure their standard of truth, are ethical even in my specialized usage: that is they are near-angry exhortations to reclamation based on a low view of human nature. For the most abstract and tautologous logic becomes the standard of truth, and the other human mental activities are downgraded because they are inevitably outside this pale. As Mr. Charner F. Perry entertainingly observed not long ago—"If we have given up goodness, beauty and parts of truth, we believe that linguistic analysis yet shall make us free."

All this looks uncommonly as if I were suggesting that all ideologies, all intellectual systems, however "free thinking," are disguised attempts to cope with the *intellectual* doctrine of Original Sin. And indeed it is interesting to speculate exactly how far the century-old Christian indoc-

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trination has sunk into the habitual *feelings* of Western intellectuals. But perhaps the important generalization is that all ideologies are based on a confusion between a radical fact of feeling and its rationalization. It looks as if a human being is an anxious kind of animal, anxious about himself and about the fact that he both needs and resents his species: and that may be as deep as you can go. But all useful thinking must then be based on recognition of this fact of feeling. One's feelings are one's own and nobody else's; therefore all valid thinking must in the first place be for oneself, all useful philosophizing must be an attempt to work out a personal way of life. This may serve as an example but can hardly aim to be a direct precept. Thinking which is useful for living is useful for somebody's living; it is likely to begin as a personal therapy, and do good in "minute particulars" only. The Christianity of Jesus appears to be like this, an attempt to deal with subjective anxiety and with the next experience, the immediate relation, the neighbor; and its expression was poetic, aphoristic, non-argumentative, stating, not trying to prove. Paradoxically, the Church has obliterated the personality of Jesus and made him unhistorical by insisting on historicity. Studied in his activity and self-expression he would have always had that reality of a vivid artistic creation which would not have depended on proof of existence. Rigid pseudo-scientific formalization has ruined the meaning and use of such poetic and philosophical intuitions as the notion of incarnation, which means that the word must become flesh, the abstract can only express itself through the concrete, thinking must not try to escape from feeling or philosophizing from poetry.

Organized and systematized Christianity in fact became the most formidable of the ideologies, especially because of its retrospective and prospective claims: that previous ethical views were valid in so far as they could be adopted or digested by Christianity, and that all humanist ethics, lacking the absolute divine sanction, are doomed to failure. This has been expressed by T. S. Eliot and others. I have elsewhere called it the rentier view, because it implies that we are living on declining moral dividends drawn from Christianity.

Certainly in its refusal to believe that there is any moral health in us without divine sanction and aid, Christianity, especially in its Roman Catholic form, has become the most exclusive of all enclosures.

But this appears to be only a matter of degree. The value of the divine sanction for morality, to the orthodox, is largely that it is absolute; in its attempt to allay moral anxiety it creates the most watertight of systems. To achieve peace of mind, or to get as near it as possible, the orthodox have to have *all* the answers. But what I am proposing here is that all western systematic philosophizing is an attempt

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to allay the philosopher's anxiety, and that all anxiety is to some extent moral anxiety. Common idiom, as so often, points to the feeling reality which philosophical language may disguise. We commonly talk about being "anxious to know" something. Comparatively recently, some philosophers, particularly Professor Wisdom, have drawn attention to the oddness of philosophizing, that some expressions of philosophical scepticism are curiously akin to *folie de doute*; while Wittgenstein said that he philosophized to remove a *feeling* of puzzlement. What the philosopher may have observed, however fleetingly, is that the sceptical position is radical: there is no system of *thinking* which will cure the *feeling* of uncertainty, because that is an immediate intuition of our human condition. But having made this observation, if indeed they have, most of them go ahead and start looking for the watertight system, the *proof* that there can be nothing certain. I believe that, probably alone among modern philosophers, Hume really grasped this radical opposition between thinking and feeling. Certainly he grasped that a total addiction to philosophy was destructive—and deliberately repaired to the backgammon table and to general conviviality. It is worthy of note that his brand of ethics was a descriptive account of the Passions, and that it allowed for tolerable self-assertion; its values were not purely negative or masochistic: pride could be proper. He also made it clear that there was no logical way in which you could get from the descriptive to the hortative, from the "is" to the "ought", no way in which my maxims can be made logically binding on you.

Marxism claims that "philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world; the problem now is to change it." But all ideologies are an attempt to change the world, or the people living in it, or both; and all systematic philosophies tend to become ideologies in this sense. *Will* you walk into my parlor—or be damned? The ordinary person resists the ideological treatment imposed by others, and Hume was ordinary or "normal" because he resisted his own. The normal mind—by which I mean the human mind preoccupied with doing its best to enjoy life from day to day—withdraws from abstract ideas as a jellyfish does from a stick, because of their compulsive nature, because they imply that you *ought* to do something, if it is only to try and understand them. It may be true that in the situation we have got ourselves into, it would be better if more people could be given a rational fright, could be made, for instance, to feel that they "ought" to do something about the threat of planetary extinction. But humanists—who are almost by definition concerned about the probable fate of the world—must bear in mind that nothing is less convincing than a rational argument, not because

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people can't really see it, but because they don't want to. People face real terrors much better than the idea of them.

It is clearly very difficult to produce a working philosophy which is adapted to human possibility and which does not at the same time suffer from the important defects of all the ideologies: which are that they use reasoning for propaganda, and that they seek to become self-evident exclusive systems which propagate an "ought," a categorical imperative like Kant's—and are therefore inherently browbeating. It is significant that Kant's altruistic maxim glorified masochism—you could suspect your unselfishness if it gave you any fun.

The rationalistic humanists of the nineteenth century who had argued their way out of an original orthodoxy could never quite close the bulkheads against the threatening inundation of moral anxiety; and this accounts, I think, more than cosmic or social preoccupations, for the famous mid-century blues of the more imaginative characters such as Matthew Arnold. Few people have wanted to be good so ardently as these agnostics. And they often set about trying to erect another self-evident system. It was much more important to them that it should be axiomatic or self-evident than that it should be workable. To be excluded even if one has excluded oneself is extremely alarming. Thrown out of one absolute you try to dig yourself into another for dear life. Long-faced, gifted George Eliot, with her headaches and her hysteria and her tremendously moral amorality, was addicted to the search for the self-evident. I suppose there was something very self-evident about the Victorian father who settled everything like an angry God.

Existentialism—in a form which does not unduly systematize or proselytize—seems to me the most acceptable philosophy for a humanist. A symptomatic advantage is the variety of existentialisms; and it is a philosophy of post hoc agreement, it is valuable in so far as you discover, on reading, that you have been living that way yourself for years: it is a philosophy which has to be lived before it is thought out.

There are really as many existentialisms as there are people who reflect honestly and consistently on themselves and their circumstances and thus learn to see that the only valid ethical statements are personal statements—of *my* experiences, *my* realizations, *my* choices and preferences. This kind of subjectivity might lead to agreement of a kind which no statements of an objective system can reach—the concurrence of feeling. The great and increasing interest in autobiographies of non-eminent characters may be due to recognition that this is the case. People want—and need—to know about people, because they need to know about themselves, to look over the wall into parallel circumstances and see that one must do so and not otherwise.

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LETTER FROM THE SOUTH

NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME

I walked down the street, didn't have on no hat,
Asking everybody I meet, Where's my man at?

—Ma Rainey

Negroes in the North are right when they refer to the South as the Old Country. A Negro born in the North who finds himself in the South is in a position similar to that of the son of the Italian emigrant who finds himself in Italy, near the village where his father first saw the light of day. Both are in countries they have never seen, but which they cannot fail to recognize. The landscape has always been familiar; the speech is archaic, but it rings a bell; and so do the ways of the people, though their ways are not his ways. Everywhere he turns, the revenant finds himself reflected. He sees himself as he was before he was born, perhaps; or as the man he would have become, had he actually been born in this place. He sees the world, from an angle odd indeed, in which his fathers awaited his arrival, perhaps in the very house in which he narrowly avoided being born. He sees, in effect, his ancestors, who, in everything they do and are, proclaim his inescapable identity. And the Northern Negro in the South sees, whatever he or anyone else may wish to believe, that his ancestors are both white and black. The white men, flesh of his flesh, hate him for that very reason. On the other hand, there is scarcely any way for him to join the black community in the South: for both he and this community are in the grip of the immense illusion that their state is more miserable than his own.

This illusion owes everything to the great American illusion that our state is a state to be envied by other people: we are powerful, and we are rich. But our power makes us uncomfortable and we handle it very ineptly. The principal effect of our material well-being has been to set the children's teeth on edge. If we ourselves were not so fond of this illusion, we might understand ourselves and other peoples better than we do, and be enabled to help them understand us. I am

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very often tempted to believe that this illusion is all that is left of the great dream that was to have become America; whether this is so or not, this illusion certainly prevents us from making America what we say we want it to be.

But let us put aside, for the moment, these subversive speculations. In the fall of last year, my plane hovered over the rust-red earth of Georgia. I was past thirty, and I had never seen this land before. I pressed my face against the window, watching the earth come closer; soon we were just above the tops of trees. I could not suppress the thought that this earth had acquired its color from the blood that had dripped down from these trees. My mind was filled with the image of a black man, younger than I, perhaps, or my own age, hanging from a tree, while white men watched him and cut his sex from him with a knife.

My father must have seen such sights—he was very old when he died—or heard of them, or had this danger touch him. The Negro poet I talked to in Washington, much younger than my father, perhaps twenty years older than myself, remembered such things very vividly, had a long tale to tell, and counselled me to think back on those days as a means of steadying the soul. I was to remember that time, whatever else it had failed to do, nevertheless had passed, that the situation, whether or not it was better, was certainly no longer the same. I was to remember that Southern Negroes had endured things I could not imagine; but this did not really place me at such a great disadvantage, since they clearly had been unable to imagine what awaited them in Harlem. I remembered the Scottsboro case, which I had followed as a child. I remembered Angelo Herndon and wondered, again, whatever had become of him. I remembered the soldier in uniform blinded by an enraged white man, just after the Second World War. There had been many such incidents after the First War, which was one of the reasons I had been born in Harlem. I rememberd Willie McGhee, Emmett Till, and the others. My younger brothers had visited Atlanta some years before. I remembered what they had told me about it. One of my brothers, in uniform, had had his front teeth kicked out by a white officer. I remembered my mother telling us how she had wept and prayed and tried to kiss the venom out of her suicidally embittered son. (She managed to do it, too; heaven only knows what she herself was feeling, whose father and brothers had lived and died down here.) I remembered myself, as a very small boy, already so bitter about the pledge of allegiance that I could scarcely bring myself to say it, and never, never believed it.

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I was, in short, but one generation removed from the South, which was now undergoing a new convulsion over whether black children had the same rights, or capacities, for education as did the children of white people. This is a criminally frivolous dispute, absolutely unworthy of this nation; and it is being carried on, in complete bad faith, by completely uneducated people. (We do not trust educated people and rarely, alas, produce them, for we do not trust the independence of mind which alone makes a genuine education possible.) Educated people, of any color, are so extremely rare that it is unquestionably one of the first tasks of a nation to open all of its schools to all of its citizens. But the dispute has actually nothing to do with education, as some among the eminently uneducated know. It has to do with political power and it has to do with sex. And this is a nation which, most unluckily, knows very little about either.

The city of Atlanta, according to my notes, is "big, wholly segregated, sprawling; population variously given as six hundred thousand or one million, depending on whether one goes beyond or remains within the city limits. Negroes 25 to 30% of the population. Racial relations, on the record, can be described as fair, considering that this is the state of Georgia. Growing industrial town. Racial relations manipulated by the Mayor and a fairly strong Negro middle class. This works mainly in the areas of compromise and concession and has very little effect on the bulk of the Negro population and none whatever on the rest of the state. No integration, pending or actual." Also, it seemed to me that the Negroes in Atlanta were "very vividly *city* Negroes"—they seemed less patient than their rural brethren, more dangerous, or at least more unpredictable. And: "Have seen one wealthy Negro section, very pretty, but with an unpaved road. . . . The section in which I am living is composed of frame houses in various stages of disrepair and neglect, in which two and three families live, often sharing a single toilet. This is the other side of the tracks, literally, I mean. It is located, as I am told is the case in many Southern cities, just beyond the underpass." Atlanta contains a high proportion of Negroes who own their own homes and exist, visibly anyway, independently of the white world. Southern towns distrust this class and do everything in their power to prevent its appearance. But it is a class which has a certain usefulness in Southern cities. There is an incipient war, in fact, between Southern cities and Southern towns—between the city, that is, and the state—which we will discuss later. Little Rock is an ominous example of this and it is likely—indeed, it is certain—that we will see many more such examples before the present crisis is over.

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Before arriving in Atlanta I had spent several days in Charlotte, North Carolina. This is a bourgeois town, Presbyterian, pretty—if you like towns—and socially so hermetic that it contains scarcely a single decent restaurant. I was told that Negroes there are not even licensed to become electricians or plumbers. I was also told, several times, by white people, that "race relations" there were excellent. I failed to find a single Negro who agreed with this, which is the usual story of "race relations" in this country. Charlotte, a town of 165,000, was in a ferment when I was there because, of its 50,000 Negroes, four had been assigned to previously all-white schools, one to each school. In fact, by the time I got there, there were only three. Dorothy Counts, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, after several days of being stoned and spat on by the mob—"spit," a woman told me, "was hanging from the hem of Dorothy's dress"—had withdrawn from Harding High. Several white students, I was told, had called—not called *on*—Miss Counts, to beg her to stick it out. Harry Golden, editor of *The Carolina Israelite,* suggested that the "hoodlum element" might not so have shamed the town and the nation if several of the town's leading businessmen had personally escorted Miss Counts to school.

I saw the Negro schools in Charlotte, saw, on street corners, several of their alumnae, and read about others who had been sentenced to the chain gang. This solved the mystery of just what made Negro parents send their children out to face mobs. White people do not understand this because they do not know, and do not want to know, that the alternative to this ordeal is nothing less than a lifelong ordeal. Those Negro parents who spend their days trembling for their children and the rest of their time praying that their children have not been too badly damaged inside, are not doing this out of "ideals" or "convictions" or because they are in the grip of a perverse desire to send their children where "they are not wanted." They are doing it because they want the child to receive the education which will allow him to defeat, possibly escape, and not impossibly help one day abolish the stifling environment in which they see, daily, so many children perish.

This is certainly not the purpose, still less the effect, of most Negro schools. It is hard enough, God knows, under the best of circumstances, to get an education in this country. White children are graduated yearly who can neither read, write, nor think, and who are in a state of the most abysmal ignorance concerning the world around them. But at least they are white. They are under the illusion—which, since they are so badly educated, sometimes has a fatal tenacity—that they

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can do whatever they want to do. Perhaps that is exactly what they *are* doing, in which case we had best all go down in prayer.

The level of Negro education, obviously, is even lower than the general level. The general level is low because, as I have said, Americans have so little respect for genuine intellectual effort. The Negro level is low because the education of Negroes occurs in, and is designed to perpetuate, a segregated society. This, in the first place, and no matter how much money the South boasts of spending on Negro schools, is utterly demoralizing. It creates a situation in which the Negro teacher is soon as powerless as his students. (There are exceptions among the teachers as there are among the students, but, in this country surely, schools have not been built for the exceptional. And, though white people often seem to expect Negroes to produce nothing but exceptions, the fact is that Negroes are really just like everybody else. Some of them are exceptional and most of them are not.)

The teachers are answerable to the Negro principal, whose power over the teachers is absolute but whose power with the school board is slight. As for this Principal, he has arrived at the summit of his career; rarely indeed can he go any higher. He has his pension to look forward to, and he consoles himself, meanwhile, with his status among the "better class of Negroes." This class includes few, if any, of his students and by no means all of his teachers. The teachers, as long as they remain in this school system, and they certainly do not have much choice, can only aspire to become the Principal one day. Since not all of them will make it, a great deal of the energy which ought to go into their vocation goes into the usual bitter, purposeless rivalry. They are underpaid and ill-treated by the white world and rubbed raw by it every day; and it is altogether understandable that they, very shortly, cannot bear the sight of their students. The children know this; it is hard to fool young people. They also know why they are going to an overcrowded, outmoded plant, in classes so large that even the most strictly attentive student, the most gifted teacher cannot but feel himslf slowly drowning in the sea of general helplessness.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the violent distractions of puberty, occurring in such a cage, annually take their toll, sending female children into the maternity wards and male children into the streets. It is not to be wondered at that a boy, one day, decides that if all this studying is going to prepare him only to be a porter or an elevator boy—or his teacher—well, then, the hell with it. And there they go, with an overwhelming bitterness which they will dissemble all their lives, an unceasing effort which completes their ruin. They

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become the menial or the criminal or the shiftless, the Negroes whom segregation has produced and whom the South uses to prove that segregation is right.

In Charlotte, too, I received some notion of what the South means by "time to adjust." The NAACP there had been trying for six years before Black Monday to make the city fathers honor the "separate but equal" statute and do something about the situation in Negro schools. Nothing whatever was done. After Black Monday, Charlotte begged for "time": and what she did with this time was work out legal stratagems designed to get the least possible integration over the longest possible period. In August of 1955, Governor Hodges, a moderate, went on the air with the suggestion that Negroes segregate themselves voluntarily—for the good, as he put it, of both races. Negroes seeming to be unmoved by this moderate proposal, the Klan reappeared in the counties and was still active there when I left. So, no doubt, are the boys on the chain gang.

But "Charlotte," I was told, "is not the South." I was told, "You haven't seen the South yet." Charlotte seemed quite Southern enough for me, but, in fact, the people in Charlotte were right. One of the reasons for this is that the South is not the monolithic structure which, from the North, it appears to be, but a most various and divided region. It clings to the myth of its past but it is being inexorably changed, meanwhile, by an entirely unmythical present: its habits and its self-interest are at war. Everyone in the South feels this and this is why there is such panic on the bottom and such impotence on the top.

It must also be said that the racial setup in the South is not, for a Negro, very different from the racial setup in the North. It is the etiquette which is baffling, not the spirit. Segregation is unofficial in the North and official in the South, a crucial difference that does nothing, nevertheless, to alleviate the lot of most Northern Negroes. But we will return to this question when we discuss the relationship between the Southern cities and states.

Atlanta, however, *is* the South. It is the South in this respect, that it has a very bitter interracial history. This is written in the faces of the people and one feels it in the air. It was on the outskirts of Atlanta that I first felt how the Southern landscape—the trees, the silence, the liquid heat, and the fact that one always seems to be traveling great distances—seems designed for violence, seems, almost, to demand it. What passions cannot be unleashed on a dark road in a Southern night! Everything seems so sensual, so languid, and so private. Desire

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can be acted out here; over this fence, behind that tree, in the darkness, there; and no one will see, no one will ever know. Only the night is watching and the night was made for desire. Protestantism is the wrong religion for people in such climates; America is perhaps the last nation in which such a climate belongs. In the Southern night everything seems possible, the most private, unspeakable longings; but then arrives the Southern day, as hard and brazen as the night was soft and dark. It brings what was done in the dark to light. It must have seemed something like this for those people who made the region what it is today. It must have caused them great pain. Perhaps the master who had coupled with his slave saw his guilt in his wife's pale eyes in the morning. And the wife saw his children in the slave quarters, saw the way his concubine, the sensual-looking black girl, looked at her— a woman, after all, and scarcely less sensual, but white. The youth, nursed and raised by the black Mammy whose arms had then held all that there was of warmth and love and desire, and still confounded by the dreadful taboos set up between himself and her progeny, must have wondered, after his first experiment with black flesh, where, under the blazing heavens, he could hide. And the white man must have seen his guilt written somewhere else, seen it all the time, even if his sin was merely lust, even if his sin lay in nothing but his power: in the eyes of the black man. He may not have stolen his woman, but he had certainly stolen his freedom—this black man, who had a body like his, and passions like his, and a ruder, more erotic beauty. How many times has the Southern day come up to find that black man, sexless, hanging from a tree!

It was an old black man in Atlanta who looked into my eyes and directed me into my first segregated bus. I have spent a long time thinking about that man. I never saw him again. I cannot describe the look which passed between us, as I asked him for directions, but it made me think, at once, of Shakespeare's "the oldest have borne most." It made me think of the blues: *Now, when a woman gets the blues, Lord, she hangs her head and cries. But when a man gets the blues, Lord, he grabs a train and rides.* It was borne in on me, suddenly, just why these men had so often been grabbing freight trains as the evening sun went down. And it was, perhaps, because I was getting on a segregated bus, and wondering how Negroes had borne this, and other indignities for so long, that this man so struck me. He seemed to know what I was feeling. His eyes seemed to say that what I was feeling he had been feeling, at much higher pressure, all his life. But my eyes would never see the hell his eyes had seen. And this hell was, simply,

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that he had never in his life owned anything, not his wife, not his house, not his child, which could not, at any instant, be taken from him by the power of white people. This is what paternalism means. And for the rest of the time that I was in the South I watched the eyes of old black men.

Atlanta's well-to-do Negroes never take busses, for they all have cars. The section in which they live is quite far away from the poor Negro section. They own, or at least are paying for, their own homes. They drive to work and back, and have cocktails and dinner with each other. They see very little of the white world; but they are cut off from the black world, too.

Now, of course, this last statement is not literally true. The teachers teach Negroes, the lawyers defend them. The ministers preach to them and bury them, and others insure their lives, pull their teeth, and cure their ailments. Some of the lawyers work with the NAACP and help push test cases through the courts. (If anything, by the way, disproves the charge of "extremism" which has so often been made against this organization, it is the fantastic care and patience such legal efforts demand.) Many of the teachers work very hard to bolster the morale of their students, and prepare them for their new responsibilities; nor did those I met fool themselves about the hideous system under which they work. So when I say that they are cut off from the black world, I am not sneering, which, indeed, I scarcely have any right to do. I am talking about their position as a class—*if* they are a class—and their role in a very complex and shaky social structure.

The wealthier Negroes are, at the moment, very useful for the administration of the city of Atlanta, for they represent there the potential, at least, of interracial communication. That this phrase is a euphemism, in Atlanta as elsewhere, becomes clear when one considers how astonishingly little has been communicated in all these generations. What the phrase almost always has reference to is the fact that, in a given time and place, the Negro vote is of sufficient value to force politicians to bargain for it. What interracial communication also refers to is that Atlanta is really growing and thriving, and because it wants to make even more money, it would like to prevent incidents that disturb the peace, discourage investments, and permit test cases, which the city of Atlanta would certainly lose, to come to the courts. Once this happens, as it certainly will one day, the state of Georgia will be up in arms and the present administration of the

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city will be out of power. I did not meet a soul in Atlanta (I naturally did not meet any members of the White Citizen's Council, not, anyway, to talk to) who did not pray that the present Mayor would be re-elected. Not that they loved him particularly, but it is his administration which holds off the holocaust.

Now this places Atlanta's wealthy Negroes in a really quite sinister position. Though both they and the Mayor are devoted to keeping the peace, their aims and his are not, and cannot be, the same. Many of those lawyers are working day and night on test cases which the Mayor is doing his best to keep out of court. The teachers spend their working day attempting to destroy in their students—and it is not too much to say, in themselves—those habits of inferiority which form one of the principal cornerstones of segregation as it is practiced in the South. Many of the parents listen to speeches by people like Senator Russell and find themselves unable to sleep at night. They are in the extraordinary position of being compelled to work for the destruction of all they have bought so dearly—their homes, their comfort, the safety of their children. But the safety of their children is merely comparative; it is all that their comparative strength as a class has bought them so far; and they are not safe, really, as long as the bulk of Atlanta's Negroes live in such darkness. On any night, in that other part of town, a policeman may beat up one Negro too many, or some Negro or some white man may simply go berserk. This is all it takes to drive so delicately balanced a city mad. And the island on which these Negroes have built their handsome houses will simply disappear.

This is not at all in the interests of Atlanta, and almost everyone there knows it. Left to itself, the city might grudgingly work out compromises designed to reduce the tension and raise the level of Negro life. But it is not left to itself; it belongs to the state of Georgia. The Negro vote has no power in the state, and the Governor of Georgia—that "third-rate man," Atlantans call him—makes great political capital out of keeping the Negroes in their place. When six Negro ministers attempted to create a test case by ignoring the segregation ordinance on the busses, the Governor was ready to declare martial law and hold the ministers incommunicado. It was the Mayor who prevented this, who somehow squashed all publicity, treated the ministers with every outward sign of respect, and it is his office which is preventing the case from coming into court. And remember that it was the Governor of Arkansas, in an insane bid for political power, who created the present crisis in Little Rock—against the will of most of its citizens and against the will of the Mayor.

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This war between the Southern cities and states is of the utmost importance, not only for the South, but for the nation. The Southern states are still very largely governed by people whose political lives, insofar, at least, as they are able to conceive of life or politics, are dependent on the people in the rural regions. It might, indeed, be more honorable to try to guide these people out of their pain and ignorance instead of locking them within it, and battening on it; but it is, admittedly, a difficult task to try to tell people the truth and it is clear that most Southern politicians have no intention of attempting it. The attitude of these people can only have the effect of stiffening the already implacable Negro resistance, and this attitude is absolutely certain, sooner or later, to create great trouble in the cities. When a race riot occurs in Atlanta, it will not spread merely to Birmingham, for example. (Birmingham is a doomed city.) The trouble will spread to every metropolitan center in the nation which has a significant Negro population. And this is not only because the ties between Northern and Southern Negroes are still very close. It is because the nation, the entire nation, has spent a hundred years avoiding the question of the place of the black man in it.

That this has done terrible things to black men is not even a question. "Integration," said a very light Negro to me in Alabama, "has always worked very well in the South, after the sun goes down." "It's not miscegenation," said another Negro to me, "unless a black man's involved." Now, I talked to many Southern liberals who were doing their best to bring integration about in the South, but met scarcely a single Southerner who did not weep for the passing of the old order. They were perfectly sincere, too, and, within their limits, they were right. They pointed out how Negroes and whites in the South had loved each other, they recounted to me tales of devotion and heroism which the old order had produced, and which, now, would never come again. But the old black men I looked at down there—those same black men that the Southern liberal had loved, for whom, until now, the Southern liberal and not only the liberal, has been willing to undergo great inconvenience and danger—they were not weeping. Men do not like to be protected, it emasculates them. This is what black men know, it is the reality they have lived with; it is what white men do not want to know. It is not a pretty thing to be a father and be ultimately dependent on the power and kindness of some other man for the well-being of your house.

But what this evasion of the Negro's humanity has done to the nation is not so well known. The really striking thing, for me, in the

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South was this dreadful paradox, that the black men were stronger than the white. I do not know how they did it, but it certainly has something to do with that, as yet, unwritten history of the Negro woman. What it comes to, finally, is that the nation has spent a large part of its time and energy looking away from one of the principal facts of its life. This failure to look reality in the face diminishes a nation as it diminishes a person, and it can only be described as unmanly. And in exactly the same way that the South imagines that it "knows" the Negro, the North imagines that it has set him free. Both camps are deluded. Human freedom is a complex, difficult—and private—thing. If we can liken life, for a moment, to a furnace, then freedom is the fire which burns away illusion. Any honest examination of the national life proves how far we are from the standard of human freedom with which we began. The recovery of this standard demands of everyone who loves this country a hard look at himself, for the greatest achievements must begin somewhere, and they always begin with the person. If we are not capable of this examination, we may yet become one of the most distinguished and monumental failures in the history of nations.

James Baldwin

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Ian Watt

BRIDGES OVER THE KWAI

When Pierre Boulle's *The Bridge over the River Kwai* came out in 1952 its title at once set me wondering. As a lieutenant in the British army I'd been one of the sixty thousand allied prisoners of war who'd slaved for the Japanese on the Burma-Siam railway along the west fork of the Meklong river; and its Siamese name was the *Kwai Noi,* meaning "small stream," as opposed to the east fork, the *Kwai Yai,* or "big stream." But although we had actually built hundreds of bridges over wayside streams, none of them had crossed the *Kwai Noi* itself; the only real bridge Boulle could be referring to was the big one at Tamarkan across the broad waters of the *Kwai Yai,* just a mile upstream from where it joined the *Kwai Noi*; and yet when I started reading I found that the bridge was supposed to be hundreds of miles to the north, just by the Burmese border.

Obviously, then, Boulle's novel made no pretense to literal authenticity; and it was as far from reflecting my own unforgotten images of what had happened ten years before along the banks of the Kwai as had been the dozen or so other novels and memoirs I'd read about the famous railroad of death; but as I read on I came to see that *The Bridge over the River Kwai* had its own kind of interest and truth.

Boulle's hero was a devoted but confused British officer, Colonel Nicholson. When, in clear violation of the Hague Convention, the Japanese camp commandant, Colonel Saito, ordered all Nicholson's officers to do manual work on the bridge, he resisted Saito's brutality so bravely that he eventually succeeded in carrying his point: but then his narrow conception of his duty led him to re-establish the morale of his troops, and to vindicate his own patriotic pride, by building an incomparably better bridge than the one the Japanese had begun, and on a much more suitable site, even though it would obviously help the enemy's army on the Burma front.

Nothing much like this had actually happened at Tamarkan or

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anywhere else; but when I thought about it I saw that Boulle's main narrative elements had some basis in fact.

The Japanese had certainly forced a great many officers in Siam to do manual work on the railway, although under conditions significantly different from those described by Boulle. At the time when the pressure had started, in November 1942, I personally had been in Chung Kai, a camp four miles north of Tamarkan. At first our commander had refused repeated demands that all officer prisoners of war be sent out to work on the railway; but when one morning we were all ordered on parade, and the Japanese guards took up their positions and loaded their rifles and machine guns, the British colonel in charge had felt obliged to yield. There was a good deal of argument afterwards as to whether the Japanese would actually have fired; witnesses, certainly, would not have deterred them, as Boulle suggested in his novel; and even if there had been no mass-shooting, the Japanese would undoubtedly have used other drastic methods to gain their ends. In any event, officers soon started doing manual labor on the railway in every camp where there were more of them than were absolutely needed to administer the troops.

I knew things had been different in Tamarkan, chiefly because, as in Boulle's novel actually, there hadn't really been a large enough surplus of officers to make it worth while for the Japanese to press the issue. The chief trouble there had been about the authority of the allied officers in charge of working parties; and after many delays and unpleasant incidents the Jaapnese commander had finally come to realize that the tasks assigned were done much better if the officers in charge were held responsible only to the Japanese engineers, and not to the Japanese prison guards, who were incapable of organizing the work properly. Some such division of responsibilities had eventually become fairly standard all along the line, but it had been carried out with particular success at Tamarkan, mainly because, as the bridge was so large, Tamarkan was a more permanent camp than any of the others and one where the work needed much more elaborate organization; there had therefore been much more opportunity—and necessity—for both sides to settle down together; and the British officer in charge had in fact exploited this situation so well that his prowess in "handling the Nips" soon became a legend.

Colonel T——— was tall, vigorous, and rather handsome, if you fancy those English faces that look like soulful bulldogs. He was not, like Boulle's Nicholson, a regular officer, but a prominent businessman; and his considerable success with the Japanese was based on an intelli-

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gent understanding of the very restricted conditions within which negotiation was possible. He was a very brave man, but he knew that in any open showdown the Japanese would always win, and so he never forced the issue in such a way as might make them lose face; instead he first awed his captors with an impressive display of military swagger; next, he proceeded to charm them with his ingratiating assumption that there could be no serious difficulty between honorable people whose only thought was obviously to do the right thing; and finally, he pleaded that, for his part, he would do all that could possibly be asked of him in the way of efficient labor management, if only he were given a reasonably free hand.

Colonel T———'s successes in dealing with the Japanese, I reflected, had actually been achieved by methods quite different from those Boulle ascribed to Nicholson. For obvious reasons: we had never been able to bargain because as prisoners we had nothing to offer which the Japanese couldn't take without asking, and we certainly hadn't had anything approaching Nicholson's trump card, his capacity to do what the Japanese had failed to do—build the bridge. For, of course, the Japanese military engineers had been perfectly capable of planning their own bridges and forcing us to build them at more or less the rate they decided. It was true that there had often been a good deal of confusion, and that their methods of work were usually rough and ready; but given the need to finish the nearly three hundred miles of railway in less than a year, over a route which a previous survey by Western engineers had pronounced insuperably difficult, and with fantastically inadequate material means, the methods of the Japanese were probably the only ones which could have succeeded.

The only possible basis I could think of for Boulle's main example of Japanese engineering incompetence was the fact that two bridges had in fact been built at Tamarkan. Actually, though, the first one hadn't been a mistake: the Japanese had merely rushed up a temporary wooden means of getting supplies across the river until a stronger and more permanent bridge of steel and concrete could be finished alongside.

It certainly seemed odd that Boulle should write as though the West had retained its monopoly of modern technology and organizational skill, when the Japanese capture of Singapore had so unequivocally proclaimed their ability to adapt Western methods to their own purposes; and I suddenly remembered an incident when this had been vividly brought home to me personally. After a hard day's work on the embankment, I'd been summoned before a notoriously cruel but capable Japanese engineer called Lieutenant Taramoto. He had looked up at

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me from his rough bamboo desk, and had gone into a long tirade in barely comprehensible English about my unspeakable wickedness in failing to tamp down the sods of turf that were placed in rows along the sides of the embankment to hold it together. Finally he had gripped his enormous unsheathed sword, waved it at me, and shouted, in panting fury: "Eef nexta you do not steep the grasses down hardly, I weel keel you." As I'd saluted hastily and retreated, I'd noticed that the book on his desk was McDougall's *Introduction to Social Psychology.*

The Japanese, I knew, had had quite enough technological expertness to get their own way on their own terms; we, on the other hand, had not been able to avoid going rather far in collaborating with them. Not that we had ever been given the choice between building a bridge for the Japanese or not building one; and the nearest any of us got to designing a bridge for them was to correct some obvious error in the measurements—if we didn't, some Japanese engineer would be sure to come round and, having beaten a few men senseless, force the rest to stay out all night doing the job properly. But the fact remained that, for whatever compelling reasons, we had actively helped the enemy by playing an important supervisory role in the building of a strategic military railway.

Even so, collaboration hadn't gone nearly as far as in Boulle, if only because to do any more than was absolutely necessary to keep relations with the Japanese tolerable, was to incur the deadly opprobrium of being called "Jap-happy." Colonel Nicholson, I reflected, would have earned the title as soon as he showed that he really wanted to build the bridge, even if it hadn't leaked out before that he had increased his men's daily work load entirely on his own initiative.

It was certainly pure fantasy for Boulle to write of sick men leaving the hospital hut and "going to work with a smile on their lips" just out of devotion for their colonel. Sometimes they had gone, in doomed resignation, at the point of Japanese bayonets; but never to please anyone, let alone a colonel, if only because respect for superior rank had weakened considerably under prison conditions. I remembered the time when a well-meaning but too conspicuously healthy colonel had stopped to say a few words of insensitive cheer to one of the worst cases in the dysentery ward; at first the man had totally ignored him, and then, without sitting up, he had suddenly opened one eye and whispered with hoarse intensity: "When I die I'll HAUNT buggers like you."

What, I wondered, would actually have happened to anyone who had tried to act in the way Colonel Nicholson did in Boulle's novel? The odds were that he would soon have been replaced. Survival came

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before seniority in the jungle camps, and incompetent or unbalanced commanding officers had often been quietly sidetracked by their junior colleagues; in one case, when the incumbent refused to go, he'd been told that unless he voluntarily went sick the doctors were prepared to stretch a point and certify him as insane.

That would have been one way out with Colonel Nicholson. In any case, he would never have lasted in a real prison camp; and yet, once again, I had to admit that there was something in Boulle's point, since Nicholson's tranced commitment to the bridge was essentially a desperate response to the most incessant of our frustrations. However much we hated the Japanese and their railway, it had been very difficult to go on day after day and month after month without putting something of ourselves into the work we were being forced to do; the need which led Nicholson to forget everything but the bridge so that he and his men could share the solidarity that comes from "concentrating on something which would last" was real enough. Still, we'd never actually been able to forget that we were prisoners, and so we'd usually found ourselves forced into a life of rather meaningless compromises between our notion of duty and our instinct of workmanship: one minute we would be doing a bit of casual sabotage with a faulty bolt or a well-placed ants' nest, and the next we'd be trying to make a neat job of a mortise and tenon joint, or straining to get some heavy timber into perfect alignment.

Boulle's picture bore little direct resemblance to what I had seen on the Kwai; but the severe internal consistency of his fiction suggested that there was nothing accidental about the way he had manipulated historical reality. His ultimate purpose, I began to realize, as I read through his other books, was to dramatize the ridiculous disparity between the West's rational technology and its self-destroying applications; Colonel Nicholson, in fact, symbolized his civilization's great sophistication about means, and its absolute, though quite unconscious, muddlement about ends.

This new perspective of the West's mastery—and misuse—of technology helped to explain Boulle's most glaring departure from the facts —making the Japanese abjectly dependent on the bridge-building skill of their captives. The other main plot element—the saboteurs of Force 316—was obviously intended to dramatize the same point. The elaborate preparations of Shears, Warden and Joyce to blow up the Kwai bridge were exactly parallel to those which Nicholson and his staff had used to build it, and taken together they demonstrated the West's absurd waste of its technological finesse, a demonstration which Boulle brought

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to an ironically appropriate climax when Nicholson, impervious to Joyce's explanations, sabotaged the saboteurs and thus caused both sides to be blown up by the mortar shells of Warden, their mutual comrade in arms.

There was every reason, I realized, why Nicholson had to remain obstinate to the last; only by blowing him up instead of the bridge could Boulle tie together all the sardonic paradoxes that he had put into *The Bridge over the River Kwai*: at the psychological level it was the climactic example of Nicholson's heroic yet self-deluded nature, and it thus provided the final thrust in Boulle's comic portrait of the British character seen from the French point of view; while, more widely, the final fatal misunderstanding underlined both the essential anarchy underlying the rigid obedience exacted by military organizations, and the blind destructiveness latent in the West's mastery of the means, but not the ends, of its technology.

Boulle's paradoxes, I had to concede, were real enough, and he had brought them together into a neatly structured plot with admirable clarity and economy; but the price he had paid for them still seemed rather too high. Mainly because the contradictions were taken too far; but also, perhaps, because they had prevented any deeper insight into the way the prisoners on the Burma-Siam railway, beset by endless contradictory appeals and dangers, had actually arrived at some sort of equilibrium. It was, I supposed, the eternal English answer to the celebrated logical clarity of the French to assert that understanding, decency, and even survival, depend less on logic than on a patient effort to make the best of all the anomalies which surround us; and Boulle's pursuit of paradox seemed to have led him to overlook the fact that the real heroes of the prison camps, like the real heroes of everywhere else, were those whose intelligence, awareness and determination enabled them to face whatever they found confronting them in such a way that they and their fellows could decently survive.

Five years after reading Boulle's novel I heard that someone called Sam Spiegel had made a movie of it, and that the director was David Lean. I remembered how Lean's refusal to soften or glamorize had made *Brief Encounter* so harrowingly convincing, and I went to see *The Bridge on the River Kwai* hoping that it would recapture something of the way that things had really been.

The first shots were very exciting: there they were, the vultures, the narrow cuttings, the bedraggled prisoners on the line, the long huts with their atap roofs, the graves, the eternal sergeant-major, the derisive

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compassion of the old hands as the new arrivals marched into camp. . . . I was almost back in the bad old days when I suddenly noticed that the straggling prisoners who had appeared earlier were all marking time on the parade ground until the whole battalion had lined up. I could see that it was a striking way of showing how their spirit was unbroken; and this was possible, perhaps probable; but I also remembered that the prisoners in Siam had very early lost the boots, the energy, and the tolerance of regimental nonsense that one needs for marking time.

In the end *The Bridge on the River Kwai* didn't recreate, except in a few brief flashes, the peculiar horror of life on the railway; but it had enough excitement and humor and visual beauty to make me forget most of my initial disappointment; and when it was over, and I walked out into the street, I was quite surprised to find myself wondering whether *The Bridge on the River Kwai* had really been as good as it had seemed.

Technically, Lean had obviously shown his old accomplishment. When Nicholson (Alec Guinness) and his officers, for example, were forced to stand all day in the sun, Lean's imaginative photography made their actual sensations seem powerfully real: there were no shadows; the heat haze suggested dizziness; and the shots taken from the ground looking upwards vividly reminded me of the agonizing effort needed merely to resist the pull of the earth. Later, during the escape of Shears (William Holden), the sequence when, on the point of hysterical collapse, he was suddenly attacked by a monstrous vulture which actually turned out to be a child's kite, had the same shocking impact as the moment in *Great Expectations* when Magwitch had pounced on Pip in the churchyard.

On the other hand, there seemed to be something about the very expertness of the movie's technique which struck a false note, at least as far as the realism of its portrayal of the lives of the prisoners was concerned; and Spiegel and Lean certainly seemed to be aiming at authenticity of background. It wasn't so much that the greens are too green on Technicolor, or that CinemaScope makes everything look spacious, but that the whole film seemed to have been conceived in terms of pictures that would justify the splendor of its technical equipment. One's most lasting impression was of the bridge itself with its two great cantilevers whose shape and color were in such perfect harmony with the surrounding landscape: it was a bridge whose poised serenity made credible, if anything could, Colonel Nicholson's infatuation with it as a symbol of permanent human achievement, but it was not a bridge

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that could possibly have been constructed without much greater material resources than would have been available under the conditions of the story.

Nor was the landscape that of the Siam I had known. Not only because the climate of the river Kelani in Ceylon, where the movie was shot, is a good deal hotter and wetter, more tropical in fact, than that of the river Kwai, but because the camera was only allowed to rest on the most satisfying combinations of luxuriant vegetation and beautifully modeled cliffs and boulders. The virtuosity of modern cinematography, it appeared, was not to be wasted on the scenes of *our* reality, a formless and colorless amalgam of a prison camp that was a chaos of sagging huts, foul latrines and decaying bedding, and a railway track that gored the earth with spoilpits and made a desolation of nature. Any sustained documentary starkness would have been completely out of the question merely for financial reasons; and, equally obviously, a good many things had had to be brought in which had nothing to do with either the actual building of the railway or with Boulle's novel.

The biggest change in Boulle's cast which had resulted from the world-wide audiences the makers of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* had been forced to take into consideration, was obviously the introduction of a big boxoffice star, William Holden. He had to be given lots to do, and as there was no American in the novel, an essentially new character had to be created for Shears with an important role on both sides; Holden, in fact, had to be both a prisoner and a commando, and yet stay within the limits of his established screen personality as a good-hearted no-good. There followed as a consequence of these fortuitous imperatives a completely miraculous escape (no prisoner on the railway had actually succeeded) involving the accidental help of some jungle villagers and a British seaplane that just happened along.

Holden himself did wonders with an improbable sequence of roles; he managed to be both convincing and infinitely engaging; and for their part Spiegel and Lean handled the implausibilities of the Holden script with great tact: the escape to the sea was frankly presented as a thrilling and yet somehow distant and dreamlike adventure, while the final rescue by the seaplane was wisely left altogether to our imaginations. Spiegel and Lean also ingeniously succeeded in using Holden to unify the two separate parts of the plot, and to fill out the ideological picture by making his stand for the forces of life and reason as opposed to the unthinking devotion to duty of both Nicholson and Warden (Jack Hawkins). Still, the criticism of muscle-bound militarism in the

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name of "living like a human being" didn't come with much authority from a character who had previously been shown as conspicuously impervious to the most modest notions of duty or honor; and while the whole narrative line concerning Holden strengthened *The Bridge on the River Kwai* purely as an adventure story, it tended to undercut whatever seriousness it could claim as a presentation of Boulle's ideas.

The most unconvincing and gratuitous change from Boulle's story was also the one which was most obviously a matter of giving the public a little of what the augurs of the box office know it wants: sex, in fact, had to be smuggled into the regrettably monastic life patterns of prison camps and jungle commandos; and so, after an embarrassing but brief affair between Holden and a nurse (Ann Sears) in Ceylon, we were given the four toothsome Siamese girls who left their jungle village to help the commandos with their heavy baggage. Holden certainly took the words right out of my mouth when he asked one of them "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" Later, there was the memorable and exciting scene when the two prettiest porteresses smeared camouflage paint onto the bodies of Shears and Joyce with eloquently lingering palpations: "Messages from Jungle Maidens" might well turn out to be Thailand's answer to the Hawaiian lei for the international tourist trade; but whatever happened afterwards in the movie was bound to be an anticlimax.

The same episodes, incidentally, were a good example of how the film world's international perspective is characteristically accompanied by a stupefying indifference to the facts of geography or politics. It was bad enough when Warden, a professor of oriental languages at a reputable university (Cambridge, England) pointed impressively to Burma on the map and called it Thailand; but the whole treatment of the Siamese villagers was exactly the sort of thing that fosters our general ignorance of what the rest of the world really thinks and feels. It's not that there aren't plenty of beautiful girls in Siam, or that the lot of its people isn't in general the most enviable one in all Asia, or even that the Siamese weren't on the whole markedly hostile to the Japanese and very friendly to allied prisoners during the war; but still, girls who carry heavy loads through the jungle don't look perfectly groomed, and certainly the poor villagers of Asia were not and are not waiting to sacrifice themselves to a purposeful political allegiance to the West. Their whole way of life inevitably imposes on them a much more limited and self-centered horizon, and if we need their help we must first give them ours: in all the little jungle settlements I saw the results of primitive conditions were only too evident—there were very few

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Siamese there who didn't show the ravages of malaria, trachoma, and a host of other diseases.

One shouldn't, I suppose, make too much of the implications of a tropical daydream that was cut short all too soon (although of course one shouldn't forget either that a lot of little distortions can add up to a thumping lie); but whatever the results of the box-office concern for sex, its concern for the Japanese viewer, which was presumably the cause of the transformation of Colonel Saito (Sessue Hayakawa) from the incompetent and sadistic drunkard of the novel to the movie's frustrated artist with an unhappy childhood, had very damaging results; the larger implications of Nicholson's conflict with Saito were immediately reduced to the level where all life's problems are resolved into the psychological fatuities of soap opera. Nor were we spared the last grinding cliché when we were shown Saito preparing to expiate his shame by committing hara-kiri, just like all the proud Samurai warriors in the movies and just unlike all the hundreds of real Japanese officers who were concerned with prisoners of war.

The part of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* which was least changed was the character and role of Colonel Nicholson; perhaps because, although Alec Guinness has considerable dramatic range as well as skill, his typical screen personality rests on a stereotype of the British character which is very similar to Boulle's conception of Colonel Nicholson: clever and ridiculous by turns, amiable and yet self-centered, sophisticated in manner but not really grown-up. The more exactingly realistic nature of the film medium seemed to make the childish and self-complacent side of the duality a good deal more obvious than it had been in the novel, especially in the scenes where Nicholson defied Saito.

If the movie started by confusing Boulle with Kipling, it ended as pure Western: the train tooted and chugged round the same old corner and—yes—the bridge was actually blown up. In the credits I'd read that the screenplay was "Written by Pierre Boulle," but I'd remained sceptical. Later I came upon an article in the French magazine *Nef* by Boulle himself in which he stated that he had taken only a "modest" part in preliminary discussions of the screenplay with Spiegel and Lean, although he had later approved their final version. Only, however, after he'd unavailingly objected to many of their changes, and above all to the blowing up of the bridge. The answer given him was that the audience would have watched the screen "for more than two hours . . . in the hope and expectation" of just that event; if it didn't happen "they would feel frustrated," and anyway it was quite impossible to pass up the opportunity for "such a sensational

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bit of action." So, on March 12, 1957, a special bridge that had cost a quarter of a million dollars to build was blown up with a real train crossing it.

In the novel, of course, Nicholson's bridge, having taken the lives of Nicholson and two of the commandos, remained to help the Japanese in their fight against the Allies: Boulle wanted to show that a tragic muddle must end in tragedy—and muddle. The movie, under pressure from the presumed demands of the audience, offered the more reassuring but less logical message that tragic muddle ends in tragedy, yes, but also in triumph. By a series of very unlikely accidents the heroism of the dead was gloriously rewarded: the saboteurs succeeded in their mission because Nicholson, recognizing Shears, finally turned his back on his delusion, and even succeeded in blowing up the bridge, helped by Warden's mortar shell which made him fall onto the detonator plunger: and as the timbers blew triumphantly skyward the audience, satisfied at last, could easily forget the men lying dead below.

The utter waste involved in building a fine bridge just to blow it up again for the delectation of a public avid for sensational realism seemed, on reflection, an ironically appropriate example of Boulle's point about the West's misemployment of its technology; and so, perhaps, was the movie as a whole. Certainly its mechanical techniques, and the skill which had employed them, were of an immeasurably higher order than the ends which they served: cause and effect, perhaps, the virtuosity of the means distracting attention from the need for a valid end, for an illuminating interpretation of human experience. On the one hand there was Lean's beautiful precision of visual statement, and his artful co-ordination of all the narrative sequences: on the other hand there was a screenplay that was an anonymous agglomeration of episodes that, however brilliantly handled, were so different in nature and atmosphere and implication that they added up to much less than the sum of their parts.

Spiegel and Lean, in fact, had succumbed to the old lure of providing something for everybody; succumbed with taste and skill, but succumbed. Mainly, perhaps, because most of the imperatives of the audience had been directly contrary to the implications of the subject in question; certainly all the movie's additions and alterations, whether to Boulle's novel or to the actual events along the River Kwai, had tended in the direction of making things more sentimental and more affirmative. The grim denials of Boulle's sardonic comedy had been brushed aside, and so had the grey colors of the prison camps; instead, the audience was left with the impression that the life of prisoners under

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the Japanese was sometimes rather like a football game; that jungle commandos at least got to have picnics and mixed bathing; that the Saitos of this world were really very sympathetic when you got to know them; that good-time Charlies like Shears turned out to be trumps in the end; and that even paranoiacs like Nicholson at least snap out of it before it's too late. No one, in fact, has to pay the full price for cruelty or selfishness or folly—or even for being what they are; ideas and actions and environments don't have their predictable consequences; and since you never see them again you're bound to assume that the sick men you saw in the hospital hut don't actually die.

Having thought about the book and the movie has at least helped me to see why I should never have expected to find in either of them the real story of the bridges on the River Kwai. Even the climax of the story would have been far too unpalatable. It is true that in the last few months of the war the Tamarkan bridge and a lot of others on the line were continuously bombed from the air, and that some trainloads of retreating Japanese troops were delayed for short periods; but hundreds of prisoners were also killed and wounded when the flying fortresses missed their targets and hit our camps; it was accidental, of course, like Colonel Nicholson's death, but there was nothing affirmative about the irony.

In any case the life of a prisoner of war is the last subject in the world for fiction. The whole point of his life is that he is not free; that he is not so much a person as an extreme case of a more general modern condition—the powerlessness of the individual caught in the grip of vast collective purposes; in the end what he does makes very little difference, and he knows it. Given the decision to build that railway and at that speed and with only those resources, it was inevitable that over twenty thousand allied prisoners should die; no one individual, good or bad, weak or strong, English or Japanese, could have reduced that toll appreciably.

The lesson for those who survived is not very different from what everybody really knows but doesn't like to admit: that survival, always a selfish business, gets more so when it is difficult; and that the greatest difficulties of the task are the result, not of any exceptional cruelty or folly but only of the cumulative effects of man's ordinary blindness and egotism and inertia. Who would want to read a book or see a movie merely to be shown that what was suffered by the real River Kwai was for the most part the product of a very common sum?

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PARIS LETTER

THE CLAIMS OF EVIDENCE

> *". . . I should like to point out that by virtue of generous exchanges and genuine solidarity we have created a community of French and Arab Algerian writers."*
>
> —Albert Camus

All the literature produced by the French-speaking Arabs, Kabyles, or Jews of North Africa has one primary purpose: to offer evidence and assert a claim. But if the evidence is noticeably similar, the claim is not always the same. Most Arab and Kabyle writers ask to be considered as men first, Algerians—or Moroccans, or Tunisians—afterwards. Albert Memmi, perhaps the only Jewish writer of French North Africa who has written specifically of his status as a Jew, also claims Tunisian nationality, but in a country, as it happens, where not only the French but the Arabs as well repudiate his claim.

Hence the community Camus refers to exists essentially on the cultural level. There was never a question of either a community of interest or one of sentiment—though since he first began writing Camus has always declared that his sympathies were with the Moslems of Algeria and though the latter have always reciprocated his feelings, with the recent exception of a few militant FLN's. What creates such a community, apparent as soon as one is familiar with this literature, is that the Maghrib writers have not translated into French a native literature expressing in another language the characteristics of a civilization different from the words they use; on the contrary, it is not merely a language they have adopted for the expression of their dilemmas and their ideas, but a whole tradition. Dib, Ferraoun, Chraïbi, or Kateb Yacine owe more to Voltaire and to Proust, to Faulkner and to Poe, than to any writers of their own language which most of them do not even know. To deny the existence of a community of French-speaking writers of both European and Maghrib stock on the pretext that they express different orders of feeling or even that on occasion they violently oppose each other, would be as inaccurate as to say that Aragon and Mauriac do not belong to the same literature because they hold different views as to their country's future and obligations.

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No one knows what might have become of North African literature had the three countries of the Maghrib developed in independence and their populations been educated in Arabic. But disregarding opinion on this historical accident, because of France's presence on the southern shore of the Mediterranean there are only French-speaking Maghrib writers, for writers write for people who can read. And people who can read *only* Arabic are less numerous in these countries than people who can read *only* French or who know both languages. To this first reason we can add another that is profounder and more important, and which must be analyzed more closely.

All French North African literature is recent, dating from the years immediately preceding or following World War II. That is, the literature developed at the same time as nationalist feeling in these countries. It was at the very moment Moroccans, Tunisians, and Algerians began to demand their independence with force that a literature was born, issuing from their own peoples but in the language of their adversaries. This can undoubtedly be accounted for in part by the fact that North African writers are deeply convinced that the men they must convince are not their Moslem brothers but the very Frenchmen to whom, since they speak their language, they necessarily address themselves; but even more by the fact that in peace as in war, an involuntary community among oppressors and oppressed has developed which both persist in denying but which nevertheless exists. Discussing a recent book by Albert Camus which happened to be about Algeria, Germaine Tillon wrote in *Preuves*: "How true it is that in their dreadful struggle the two adversaries have never ceased—and cannot cease—fighting side by side: the same grain nourishes them, they read the same books." And about this same book, a Moslem Algerian schoolteacher wrote Camus: "Gradually, for over a century, the Algerian peoples of European origin have detached themselves from Europe to the point of becoming unrecognizable and resembling only themselves; I mean, resembling those other Algerians whom they despise but whose accent, tastes, and passions they share." The Algerian community is born of this reverse assimilation, not of Algerians to France, but of the French to Algeria. And it is only natural that a common cultural basis has appeared which is the same for the Kabyle Ferraoun, the half-Lorrainese, half-Spanish Algerian Camus, the Oranian Roblès of Spanish origin, Jean Daniel, a Berber Jew, and Albert Memmi, a Tunisian Jew, as for Driss Chraïbi and Mohammed Dib, Moroccan and Algerian Arabs.

Furthermore, those Maghrib writers who offer the strongest evidence and assert the most stringent claims do so in the name of prin-

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ciples they have learned from France, whom they all oppose to a greater or lesser degree. When Chraibi, in his novel *Les boucs,* violently denounces the French for their treatment of the North African workers, he is merely demanding that same respect for human rights he learned in French schools. And when Mohammed Dib denounces oppression in all its forms, rallying to a militant communism, he is only transferring the requirements his enemies have taught him to a situation his own country has afforded him.

These are the reasons why a French-speaking Maghrib literature has developed at the same time as a rebellion against France. For this is a revolt practiced in the name of what France has contributed, rejecting her political presence while insisting on her political and moral principles, and drawing closer to her civilization every day. The former *Président du Conseil* Edgar Faure tells how during the discussion of the Moroccan agreements he received two delegations in the same day: the first consisted of Moroccans wearing *jallabahs* and *babushes,* speaking French with difficulty, and loudly and sincerely insisting that the French remain in the realm of the sherif. The second was composed of elegant gentlemen in European clothes and speaking impeccable French, all graduates of our universities and our institutes: it had come to express to the head of the state the sentiments of unyielding nationalism on the part of the Moroccan elite which France had formed.

A last consideration, and perhaps the most surprising: French-speaking Maghrib literature was born simultaneously among native and French populations. It was just after the Second World War that French writers of Algeria first became known in France: Albert Camus, Jules Roy, Emmanuel Roblès. Algeria's intellectual evolution had been no different for them, and this people, at first dedicated to the severest colonial and military ordeals, had now reached the point where it had both the time and the need to express itself. But this was not the case for only a part of the community: Arabs, Kabyles, Jews, and Europeans all began to speak at once.

It would be a long task to list all the works in French by Maghrib writers. But we may choose a few of the most characteristic, classifying them according to their subjects, for in most cases they are the same.

As always in poor countries, childhood and its sufferings, in the form of more or less fictionalized autobiographies, occupies a prominent place. What Camus in *L'envers et l'endroit* did for a poor European child Mouloud Ferraoun has done for a Kabyle boy and Mohammed Dib and Ahmed Sefrioui for Arab girls. Mouloud Ferraoun's *Le fils du pauvre* tells how a Kabyle boy is dying of hunger but meanwhile manages

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to go to school; Mohammed Dib's *La grande maison* deals primarily with the miseries of a city child. Both are books of great beauty; they have a certain human quality that keeps the characters from ever seeming exotic, despite all that separates them from us. In other words, *local color* is a secondary element. It exists for reality's sake, but what counts are the lives of human beings. Perhaps Ahmed Sefrioui's *La boîte à merveilles* is an example of the contrary tendency: the author evidently delights in underlining everything that might seem strange to us in the customs and behavior of the men and women he describes. Ferraoun and Dib—at least in the latter's first book—make more of an effort to offer evidence than to assert a claim. But evidence is also a claim when it exposes an intolerable destitution.

It is a fact that the Kabyle community permanently furnishes about four hundred thousand workers to metropolitan France. Precious as this labor force is to France, more precious still to the overpopulated, undernourished Kabyle districts are the salaries which the workers overseas punctually send home to their families. But it is also a fact that the North African workers in France suffer from poverty, from exploitation by employers and the "caïds" who find them work and housing, and also from unemployment, even though they are rarely anything but unskilled laborers. It is this drama which Driss Chraïbi has chosen to write about—a little too symbolically, a little too lyrically—in *Les Boucs*. Similarly, Mouloud Ferraoun recounts in *La terre et le sang* the adventures of a Kabyle worker who marries a Frenchwoman while working in France and then returns with her to live in his native village.

Alongside this literature of testimony, we find another kind, in which the attitudes of revolt are expressed more explicitly though often less effectively. The difference is particularly apparent between two books like Mohammed Dib's *La grande maison,* in which the writer speaks only of his childhood, and the same author's *Le métier à tisser,* in which the description of indigence and abjection is interwoven with a strain of philosophical Marxism which ultimately weakens the denunciation of poverty, depersonalizing and thereby diluting the nature of the revolt. Similarly, Katez Yacine's rather Faulknerian use of myth and technical devices makes *Nedjma* a successful book from a literary point of view but less haunting than the perfect simplicity of style and the modesty of means employed by Mouloud Ferraoun or Mohammed Dib in his early manner.

There remains a community of which it is rather difficult to speak, since in literature at least it rarely offers itself as such: the Jews. The situation of the Algerian Jews is certainly equivocal. French citizens

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since the Crémieux decree at the end of the last century, they are the objects of a double antisemitism, on the part of both the Algerian French and the Moslems. It must be added that the French version, particularly at present, is much more virulent than the other. Yet a man like Jean Daniel, a Blidah Jew of Berber origin, in a novel like *L'erreur,* feels no need to account for his Judeo-Algerian status. He writes a French novel concerned with problems unconnected with what has been, until his arrival in Paris just after the war, his situation as an Algerian Jew. In fact, once he reaches the soil of metropolitan France, the Algerian Jew loses his ambiguous status, becoming a Jew like any other; and if antisemitism persists in certain areas of the French middle class and even in certain professions, it is neither widespread nor violent enough to keep a French Jew from feeling as genuinely French as anyone else. The double cultural and national assimilation is so complete that an Algerian Jewish intellectual like Daniel is nothing more than a French intellectual who has written a novel in which he has put a great deal of himself, but himself purely as an individual.

This is not the case with Albert Memmi, who describes in *The Statue of Salt* the childhood and youth of a Tunisian Jew. This novel, manifestly autobiographical, can be compared with books by Moslem writers in the sense that it is French in language, mentality, and culture, but it remains essentially the work of a Tunisian Jew who deals with himself as such.

What is henceforth certain is that beyond or above political dissension and even the bloodiest battles, a French-speaking North African literature exists, and that it too bears a double witness. For it expresses the testimony of those who speak and offers evidence in and of itself. What it proves is that France has brought the peoples on the southern shore of the Mediterranean a culture they will certainly retain even if they reject the forms and ordinances which have been forced upon them. But from this point of view, more than the Maghrib is concerned. It is enough to have read or listened to a man like Taha Hussein to understand what French culture means to Egypt. And the situation is the same in Syria and Lebanon. The question today is whether the stupidity and obstinacy of politicians clinging to ephemeral political forms will ultimately destroy an influence that might profit everyone. The *présence française,* in North Africa as in Egypt, in Syria, or in Lebanon, is much more Mohammed Dib, nationalist and communist as he is, or Mouloud Ferraoun, both of whom testify to its existence more than certain colonels and parachute troops.

Jean Bloch-Michel

(*Translated from the French by Richard Howard*)

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THEATER CHRONICLE

ODD MAN IN

A TOUCH OF THE POET. Eugene O'Neill. Helen Hayes Theater.
EPITAPH FOR GEORGE DILLON. John Osborne and Anthony Creighton. John Golden Theater.
DEATHWATCH. Jean Genêt. Theater East.

A drunkard, an unemployed actor, and a petty criminal are the non-heroes of these new plays, all written by men of real talent in a mode of defiant honesty that has come to be their professional signature. Each deals with a *mauvais sujet* who is also a painful subject, and each is tense with a lyrical rhetoric of confession and self-exposure that at times amounts to hysteria, embarrassing to the audience, which, not being trained as a priestly confessor, regards the stage revelations as an attack. More and more today, the theater at its most serious is becoming an arena of combat with the audience; arena theater or theater-in-the-round is not just a presentational gimmick but a style of writing that involves the spectator as an unwilling accessory and that works just as well when the proscenium arch is kept.

The non-hero as a disturbing central figure had already been discovered by Chekhov, in the early play, *Ivanov*, now running at the Renata Theatre. Nothing Chekhov did later is as radical as this study. Uncle Vanya is ineffectual and the novelist Trigorin is a middling sensual man, but their non-heroic qualities are seen in a softened and palliated light: "Well, it's only human nature," a neighbor might philosophize of their conduct. This is not true of Ivanov, a very strange man, sallow, nervous, good-looking, sensitive, fond of reading, without evident vices, who is ruining his property and the lives and characters of everyone around him by an inner demoralization. He is married to a tubercular Jewess, whom he once loved and who is now just such a febrile, melancholy invalid as a provincial doctor, like Chekhov, might see regularly on his rounds. Ivanov's family doctor has told him, repeatedly, that his course of conduct is literally killing his wife: the inability to settle down to anything, to stay home for a single evening or put any kind of order into his affairs. Ivanov feels compunction without being able to change. You would think, comments the spectator, that

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he could be nice to her for a few hours at least, under the circumstances. But no, he cannot. It is off to the town in a buggy—to a vulgar provincial salon that bores him. And yet he is not a villain—only not a hero; Chekhov, a realist, takes pains to show that it would require actual heroism for this restless person to spend a few hours with his ailing wife. Invalids are trying to be with. But just this allowance that Chekhov, as an experienced doctor, makes for Ivanov renders the character highly disturbing to the audience. Is he excusable or isn't he? Or, as the audience keeps arguing during the intermission, is he supposed to be "sympathetic"?

The audience, furthermore, could be reconciled to Ivanov if it were assured that he was the victim of a complex or a typical product of a social environment and hence "determined," an effect of a known cause. But no explanation is forthcoming; it really is not clear why this man is falling to pieces. All that is plain is that Ivanov cannot control his actions, that his actions are indeed the reverse of what he would will them to be. His behavior is a doom or tic to which he is subject without being altered in his inner nature. A liberal of emancipated views, he commits the unforgivable sin, at a climactic point of the plot, of taunting his sick wife with being Jewish; this sin, just because it is unforgivable, has been waiting for him all along, as though it were endowed with consciousness and had only to bide its time for him to commit it—at the most unforgivable moment. "Why did you have to say that *then*?" the audience, appalled, wants to shriek at him. "You know the poor woman is dying." But the truth is that the cry "Jewess!" had to leap out of him at the very instant when he would least consent to utter it, when, in other words, it could not be taken back. And having gone this far, Ivanov goes still further in shamelessness; he lets her know what the doctor had been keeping from her, the facts of her condition.

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Ivanov has done the unpardonable and yet he is not even a villain. This position is the very essence of the non-heroic. It is not the immortal gods that have been offended but Ivanov's conception of himself as an educated, civilized gentleman who would not do precisely what he has just done. This sensitive conception feels pain, and in that very idea there is naturally something ludicrous. "Forgive me, Nora; that was unpardonable," says Major Con Melody in *A Touch of the Poet,* apologizing to his wife for an ugly statement that "slipped out." Almost immediately, he does it again. "Deeply moved," he kisses her and then suddenly pushes her away. "For God's sake, why don't you wash your hair? It turns my

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stomach with its stink of onions and stew." And once more: "Forgive me, Nora." This is Jimmy Porter, all over, in *Look Back in Anger*: "Darling, I'm sorry. . . . I'm sorry. . . . I mean it." Such jerky, inconsonant behavior, like the twitching of a nerve, is found in all the non-heroes of the modern stage, in James Tyrone of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Jimmy, Archie Rice of *The Entertainer*, Lefranc, the petty thief of *Deathwatch*, as well as Ivanov, George Dillon, and Con Melody. They carry the unpardonable to its furthest limits, and yet in themselves they do not appear to be sufficient cause for what they do, even though, in fact, they may be directly responsible for the death or destruction of another person: Ivanov for the death of his wife, James Tyrone for the drug-addiction of *his* wife and the near-death of his son, Jimmy for the death of Alison's unborn child, Archie for the death of his father, Lefranc for the murder of Maurice, a harmless seventeen-year-old punk. Their actions do not make them great, even in a criminal sense, because their actions are somehow inexpressive of who they are, and many of these non-heroes require a forgiving woman who claims to "understand."

Of the three new plays, Jean Genêt's *Deathwatch* is the coldest examination of the non-hero, because the scene is laid, not in conventional society where "forgiveness" and "understanding" are readily accorded and have to be (otherwise, there would be no getting on), but in a prison cell, where an inflexible code prevails. The criminal code is one of strict rank: a killer rates highest and a pickpocket or housebreaker is lowest on the scale. Multiple crimes of immense daring (e.g., sensational daylight holdups) may be matched against the beauty of a single exquisite killing, and other factors, such as the amount of newspaper publicity, the length and breadth of the manhunt, and the demeanor of the accused when captured, are taken into consideration. These standards, at which the audience laughs, are taken very seriously by the prisoners and the guards, who are concerned with definitions of greatness: which is greater, the Negro called Snowball (never seen onstage), whose crimes include the hold-up of a gold train, or Green Eyes, who has killed a little girl? In reality, the atmosphere of Genêt's prison is remarkably like that of a big-city American high school, with its football and basketball heroes, secret societies, crushes, jealousies, favoritism, and interracial tension. "Snowball is exotic," boasts Lefranc at the beginning, excited because the big Negro has smiled at him in the corridor that morning. Nevertheless, those who laugh at all this are probably being philistines, from Genêt's point of view: they are people who laugh at a poem. "Snowball is black, but he dazzles," says Lefranc, and

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Green Eyes shines in the cell like a steady burning jewel, quickening in Lefranc, a small-time thief and liar, an impulse to rob him of his glory, that is, to become his equal by committing a murder of his own. He strangles Maurice, Green Eyes's lover, the third occupant of the cell. But he is not "big" enough for his action, which remains a mere inert byproduct of his petty will and thieving ambition. "What am I going to do? Green Eyes, help me," he cries out, and Green Eyes replies, "*I* help you? You disgust me. To rub out a boy who hadn't done a thing. For nothing. For glory. . . . You disgust me." Green Eyes, a natural being, had not wanted his own unnatural crime; it had chosen him, singled him out as he walked down the street with a sprig of lilac in his teeth. God or the devil had presented him with his "glory," a dubious gift, that had caused him much suffering to accept. In the words of society, he has paid for his crime. Lefranc's misunderstanding of all this is what keeps him from belonging, from being accepted in the prison, even by the guards. "You are right. I am really alone," says Lefranc as the curtain falls.

Lefranc, though not an artist in crime, is an artist in words; he has been writing Green Eyes's letters to his wife. "I am the postoffice," he says at one point, recalling Joyce's Shem the Postman. The word-artist is the permanent outsider; even the humblest criminals, like Maurice, will not accept him as one of them. For John Osborne in *Epitaph for George Dillon,* it is the shabby smallness of George Dillon that marks him straight off for an artist. You would know he was some sort of actor or writer (actually, he is both) because of his long rather greasy hair, with the forelock hanging down, hungry, ferret face, sleepy gait, selfishness, and mooching habits; added to this, he is a vegetarian, speaks in an educated voice, and tells lies. No ordinary person could be as awful as George, and he is half-persuaded of this himself. The very word, *actor,* which is what he is, strikes him as derisory and shameful. Toward ordinary people, among whom he is thrown by necessity, his attitude is one of mingled contempt and stark wonder. A brisk, sentimental, lower-middle-class woman, Mrs. Elliot, has brought him home from the office to live with her family because she "believes" in him and his future; to George, her belief is at once grotesque and wonderful. She identifies him, quite illusorily, with her son, who was killed in the war and whose room George moves into as a non-paying boarder. "You stupid-looking bastard," exclaims George violently, as soon as he is left alone with the cherished son's photo.

The saddest part about George—the source of confusion—is that he is not altogether a faker. The play he has been writing improbably

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gets produced, after it has been edited to suit the popular taste. He becomes, in the end, a success, which was what he and Mrs. Elliot wanted for him, but being a "success" is the ultimate absurd ignominy. "Turned out to be Bernard Shaw, after all, eh?" says Mrs. Elliot's husband, Percy, contemplating the box office returns; George, in short, has compelled the admiration of "a small, mean little man" by the vulgarity of making good. He has moved, like a clown, from the cliché of failure to the platitude of success, and indeed he is trapped in clichés and platitudes, detected by his ear but beyond the power of his will to escape from, like the hideous furniture—the cocktail cabinet, the "contemporary" chair, the telly, and the painting of ducks in flight ("those blasted birds")—of the Elliot home. George had "hoped, thought he was that mysterious, ridiculous being called an artist"; instead, he finds himself written into a script of his own creation, which has him having to marry the younger Elliot daughter, whom, incredibly, he has got in the family way. "Incredibly," "improbably"—that is the way things happen to George; either he is real to himself and outside events are therefore incredible because they seem to have no connection with him, or vice versa: the events are real and he, amidst them, is the improbability.

It cannot be a coincidence that all three of the current non-heroes are fish out of water—educated men confined with illiterates or the nearest thing to it—and that all three, as if to emphasize their false position, are liars. To the Elliot family (Percy Elliot excepted), George is always a gentleman, that is, a superior order of person entitled to superior consideration. This is only another way of saying that George, to them, is an artist; seen from below, the two appear to be the same thing. In the prison world of *Deathwatch,* such illusions do not exist, and Lefranc's superior education makes him, if anything, suspicious to his cellmates. But in *A Touch of the Poet,* as the title indicates, you again find an artist-gentleman profiting with a bad conscience from the respect of the uncultured. Major Cornelius Melody, late of the Duke of Wellington's service in the Peninsular War, now a derelict tavern-keeper in New England, is worshipped and coddled as an aristocrat by his low-born, rheumatic drudge of a wife, who wears herself out in the inn so that he can keep a thoroughbred mare in the barn, spout passages of Lord Byron, and once a year put on his fine red uniform to celebrate at a drunken dinner the anniversary of the Battle of Talavera. He and George are really museum-pieces kept in the house by the lower orders and tenderly brushed and polished; this is vividly symbolized by O'Neill in the red uniform of the British Army officer that is brought down from the trunk ceremonially every July 27 for the ruined Irish

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major to posture inside of. But like so many home-preserved museum-pieces, the major is of doubtful authenticity. He is not an aristocrat but the son of a new-rich peasant; his army career was genuine, like the bit of anguished truth in George, but, by the time the play opens, Con Melody is nothing but a seamy drunkard living off the sweaty labor of others, whom he despises for their smell. The major's excuse is that, again like George, he has a finer consciousness—a touch of the poet. Moreover, the protective museum-atmosphere that surrounds him is a prison, allowing him no freedom to be what he actually is; it is his wife and daughter who press him to go upstairs and put on his uniform. The major and George are half-unwilling actors performing at the request of the pit. Their lies and semi-truths are bolstered by other lies—the shock-absorbent cushions of the unlettered. "It was the liquor talking," says Nora, explaining Con away, even though everyone else in his establishment knows that Con means what he says but did not mean to say it . . . exactly.

The notion of a gentleman, above all of a poet-gentleman, cuts two ways. If it implies ready, soothing forgiveness on the part of the lower orders, it also implies that there are certain things a gentleman cannot do and be forgiven—at any rate by himself. Education and sensitivity are supposed, by those who have them, to constitute some sort of guarantee or safeguard; that, in fact, they do not is the terrible and banal discovery of the non-hero. He cannot, as they say, live with himself afterwards. The shock of hearing himself transgress the limits of what he feels to be civilized conduct is almost too much for Ivanov: he cannot be the person he thought he was. This is what happens to Green Eyes, 22 years old, handsome, and analphabetic, when the lurid crime he commits fastens itself on him like another, strange identity with which he must become reconciled before he can become a god, one of "les grands, les durs." But for the educated semi-gentleman, no other identity, including that of a god, is socially possible. "Live with himself *socially*" is what is meant. Neither Ivanov nor George Dillon nor Con Melody can tolerate his own shameless company.

What recourse is left to them? Ivanov, who is about to be married to a young girl, shoots himself instead. The title of the Osborne play, *Epitaph for George Dillon,* suggests that Mr. Osborne has finally got rid of Dillon, a bad lot. In the last act of the O'Neill play, a shot is heard, and the audience, together with Con's wife and daughter, assumes that he has killed himself. No such luck for him; he has only shot his beautiful mare, the sign of his lying pretensions, and comes into the tavern announcing in a thick peasant brogue that the major is

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dead—"the late lamented auld liar and lunatic, Major Cornelius Melody, av his Majesty's Seventh Dragoons. . . . He didn't bother shooting himself, since it'd be a mad thing to waste a bullet on a corpse!" This is just theatrics; the part of the leering peasant is as much of a masquerade as the part of the major. But it allows the play to stop.

A play without hero or villain has a hard time stopping or indeed going anywhere. The equivocal character of the central figure makes the action necessarily repetitious and irresolute, a seesaw of conflicting motives. Nothing for these people is *final.* The only play of the current group that definitively ends is *Deathwatch,* which is the only one with an uncompromising moral standard: Green Eyes has stayed aloof from the action, watching, like a *deus absconditus,* and then steps in to judge Lefranc as though he were Justice itself. There is nothing more to be said.

The Osborne play, his first, written in collaboration with Anthony Creighton, has already closed; public opinion did not like it. It was extraordinarily well acted, but this passed almost unnoticed, and why not? No one can tell the difference any more. Winsome Helen Hayes, that brave little body, was "hailed" for a performance in the O'Neill play that would have caused real uneasiness in a high school play; bent back, nodding, quavering head, tottering gait, copious winks, groans, and sly, rheumy grimaces left the impression that here was a child—plucky thing too—playing the part of a hobbling crone of forty or forty-five. It would be better to read the play than to be obliged to watch her, even though Eric Portman is sometimes very striking as Con Melody. The acting in the Genet, done by young people, is quite passable.

Mary McCarthy

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William Phillips

THE AMERICAN ESTABLISHMENT

It is fortunate that military battles are not like literary ones, which in our open-minded society are never really won. Imagine having to fight the Battle of Bunker Hill every few years. Yet this is precisely what happens on the "cultural front," where the argument over such questions as mass culture, *kitsch,* the avant-garde, highbrow and middlebrow,[1] breaks out again and again, as though the rules of the controversy stipulated that nothing could ever be settled. The reason, of course, is that the clash is not just over differences of opinion or taste; it involves opposing views about the nature of art and culture and society, and periodically a new generation or a new grouping feels morally bound to take its stand.

In the past, the issues were usually discussed—or dismissed—in a polemical and programmatic atmosphere, and the big guns were almost always on the side of the rebels, that is, on the side of purity and intransigence: indeed one scarcely recalls offhand any important writer advocating the way of moderation. The most strident declarations were those of the avant-garde; but even the more temperate statements, by such varied figures as Matthew Arnold, or Ortega y Gasset, or the early Van Wyck Brooks, were actually attacks on complacency, philistinism, and the anarchy of the new middle-class culture.

More recently, however, the tide has turned. For one thing, the avant-garde is everywhere on the run, except, perhaps, in painting, which in this period seems to have one foot outside the culture—yet, because of the medium, is pulled into the marketplace. I have in mind, of course, a serious and sustained avant-garde, not the chic variety that moves to TV and Hollywood before anyone has time to be shocked

1. I am using these and other terms in their generally accepted sense, though their exact meaning is debatable. Unfortunately, too, some of these terms sound pompous, but so far we have no others. I might also be accused of lumping unrelated terms, but the connection between them is basic to my view.

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by it. But even a genuine avant-garde would be in danger of becoming immediately fashionable, because what we have today is not so much an outright opposition to anything serious or extreme as a zeal to make it palatable. Hence a kind of cultural mediation, which at one time would have been scorned, has now become intellectually respectable, and though this mediation occasionally creeps into literary criticism in the guise of sanity and modulation, more often the task of adapting to the cultural order is assumed by the literary journalists, who add to the general confusion by making everything serious amusing and taking everything amusing seriously. The now famous example of such journalistic enterprise is Russell Lynes's essay, "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," in which the distinctions are converted into a social game, but the effect is to boost the status of the middlebrow, as the lowbrow naturally does not count, while the highbrow is taken down for being both too snooty and too academic. Despite the breeziness of the piece, Lynes does hit upon one of the central points in the entire controversy, for by separating the highbrow from high art—or from the avant-garde—he rationalizes the process whereby creative or critical work of high quality can be taken over without accepting the values that made them possible. This separation is most essential to any theory of the "middle way" in culture; and the art it generates—art that imitates the forms of high art while rejecting its values—comes under the heading of *kitsch*.

The task of transforming live issues into academic ones was left mostly to the sociological critics and the sociologists who have lately appropriated these literary questions, presumably to study them in a more factual and analytic manner. Again the result has been to blur the question of values. In the beginning, the sociological critics—who combined an interest in literature, philosophy and psychology—set out to examine the origins and effects of "mass culture" and *"kitsch,"* to look over the enemy, as it were, because these phenomena were a threat to what they believed to be true art and culture. But soon the study became an end in itself and the "critics" embarked on what can only be described as an endless tabulation of the "content" of movies, television, comics, etc. One thing leads to another and before long they began to make aesthetic distinctions within this vast commercial output originally thought to be outside the bounds of art.

A few sociologists without special literary training also entered the field, though their concern was of a different nature. They came to culture mainly through an interest in the structure of American democracy. But in their enthusiasm over the genuine cultural benefits of an egali-

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tarian society, they failed to observe that in the past the introduction of culture to a new class has always been accompanied by regression as well as advance; and they ignored almost completely the *nature* of the education and the culture now available to the population as a whole. Thus, in comparison with the sociological critics, the sociologists had one big advantage: they did not bring with them any prejudices against "mass" or "middlebrow" culture. They presented themselves simply as social scientists investigating new cultural forms, and, except for a natural dedication to progress, they claimed to be thoroughly objective and disinterested. But we know that disinterestedness often cloaks a bias, and in the case of the sociologists it can certainly be said that many of them have gone beyond the call of scientific duty in taking a rosy view of the situation. If, as they claim, they are really concerned with developing a constructive attitude toward American culture, they would do better to dissociate themselves from its failings while identifying with its achievements.

An example of the scientific approach is a recent attempt by Seymour Lipset to prove that the degree of anti-intellectualism in America has been greatly exaggerated (*Encounter,* April, 1957). So far as I can judge, Lipset has done good work in other areas, but this article, which modestly begins by reporting the results of a poll, ends in the most transparent cultural apologetics. It seems, according to Lipset, that a number of people, asked what their favorite professions were, ranked the college professor fifth, the "artist who paints pictures to exhibit in a picture gallery" twelfth, the "musician in a symphony orchestra" fourteenth, and the "author of novels" fifteenth. Lipset also cites another poll showing that intellectuals have much the same rating in Japan, Great Britain, Denmark, Australia. Now I am not competent to dispute these polling techniques, but it should be obvious even to an amateur that the "data" they yield have little to do with the question of anti-intellectualism. They merely rank certain accepted professions. How about the young poet, the literary critic, the esoteric musician, the avant-gardist who has not yet made it? Surely we do not need a poll to tell us that Pearl Buck or Earle Stanley Gardner rank high in the esteem of their countrymen, or that professors who are nothing but technicians in some useful field are prized by government and industry. But Lipset really gives the show away in the course of explaining why American intellectuals persist in their delusions about anti-intellectualism. He grants that mass culture is on the rise, that there is a "lowering of overall levels of taste," and that intellectuals are cut off from the rest of the "elite," especially from those who yield political power, at least

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as compared with intellectuals in Europe. But then he begins to find explanations that entirely subvert the force of this observation. Intellectuals, he explains, are "cut off" because there are so many of them, dispersed throughout the country; and they are certainly not undervalued since, by the only standard that is truly objective, their remuneration is quite high. Besides, the situation may be temporary—by which he apparently means that it can only get better, not worse. And in any case, what do intellectuals expect: for one thing, it is natural that they should be attacked since they have always represented a left-wing minority; in addition, intellectuals have to reconcile themselves to the historic truth that political democracy—and egalitarianism—must be accompanied by cultural democracy, with the inevitable spread of mass culture and debasement of taste. To be sure, Lipset is right in calling attention to the ticklish and unsolved problem of the relation of political to cultural egalitarianism, but the fact is that what Lipset, himself, is really arguing for is an adaptation to a popular and democratic culture.

A more rounded view is that of Edward Shils, a distinguished sociologist and political observer, in a review of *Mass Culture,*[2] ("Daydreams and Nightmares," *Sewanee Review,* Autumn 1957). Shils sticks mainly to mass culture and largely ignores the whole question of middle culture, but he does express certain opinions about art and society that have wider implications. His main argument, made in the course of a running attack on Dwight Macdonald, Ernst Van den Haag, Leo Lowenthal, Czeslaw Milosz and other critics of "mass culture," might be summarized as follows: mass culture, however debased—though it is in fact not as debased as its critics claim—is merely the result of the spread of literacy and education and does not seriously interfere with the normal pursuit of artistic and intellectual life. The critics of mass culture, says Shils, take a dark view of the situation because they have been infected by three false and negative ideologies, Marxism, Romanticism, and the aristocratic tradition. As Marxists or ex-Marxists, they connect the cheapness of popular and commercial culture with the alienation of modern man and the breakdown of bourgeois society; their romanticism consists in an idealized image of the past; and their aristocratic leanings are responsible for the notion, traceable to figures like Ortega y Gasset and T. S. Eliot, that culture belongs to an elite. Naturally, as Shils swings his polemical axe, he catches his conglomerate opponents in many inconsistencies and absurdities, though he never disproves the theories he attributes to them. However, my concern here is not with the critics

2. Edited by Bernard Rosenberg and David M. White. Free Press, $6.50.

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of popular culture but with Shils's own views and with the questions themselves.

Now, on the surface, Shils's position appears reasonable, and in many respects right. His distinction, for example, between "mass" and "middle" culture is a much needed one, and he is certainly correct in maintaining that the more popular forms pose the smallest threat to the arts because they have so little in common with them. What I think is wrong with Shils's position is that it has no stakes in that world which sustains serious, advanced intellectual and creative effort, no stakes, that is, beyond the fact that Shils is naturally in favor of its achievements. He is really concerned with the welfare of the culture as a whole—the culture in an anthropological sense, hence he is interested not so much in promoting "high" or "advanced" culture as in minimizing the difficulties under which it labors in our society. In all fairness, it should be said that Shils *is* concerned with the perpetuation of the cultural tradition, but this he assumes to be the job of individual talent, every man on his own. And if intellectuals lower their standards —as, according to Shils, they apparently are doing—they have no one to blame but themselves. "The root of the trouble lies not in mass culture but in the intellectuals themselves. The seduction and corruption of intellectuals are not new, although it is true that mass culture is a new opportunity for such degradation." Logically, of course, this is true; one need not yield to the pressures of his culture—whether they be "mass" or "middle"—but I am sure Mr. Shils would not deny that the kind of art and thought produced at any given time is very much affected by the total social and intellectual situation. Besides our problem is not to measure the moral stamina of intellectuals or to give pep-talks to keep them pure; on the contrary, our problem is to assess the forces that seduce or corrupt intellectuals and generally debase the culture, and it is precisely this problem that Shils evades by constructing an idyllic picture of social and artistic progress.

Shils does grant that philistinism and commercalism in education and literary journalism as in mass entertainment have some bad effect on intellectual life. But his commitment to the cultural order is so strong and his view of history so optimistic that he regards the most virulent aspects of popular and middle culture as temporary setbacks in the growth of democratic society, which by definition brings more comfort and culture to more people. "The reading of good books," says Shils, "the enjoyment of superior music and painting, although perhaps meagre, is certainly more widespread now than in previous centuries, and there is no reason to believe that it is less profound or less genuine.

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Only the frustrated attachment to an impossible ideal of human perfection, and a distaste for one's own society and for human beings as they are, can obscure this." Thus Shils, in his zeal to defend democratic culture against intellectual purists and snobs, gives a new twist to the old populist aim of bringing light to the masses, which was actually a more primitive version of the modern, statistical view. No one can be opposed to such cultural piety as Shils invokes when he speaks of the exposure of people to good books or painting, but there is actually no evidence, as he himself must know, that the mass marketing of books or the increase in the number of concert-goers has actually improved the quality of our lives and our culture. On the contrary, the appeal to statistics is double edged, for one might ask why the audience for the kind of work—in poetry and criticism, for example—that has not been glamorized remains so small, despite all the sales figures behind Shils's argument. Really, the quantitative approach is just a tautology: all it proves is that a given number of people read a given number of books, or listen to a given number of classical symphonies, and generally such data belong to the department of adult education.

The interesting and complex question about our culture is on a different level; it has to do with the fate of that minority which produces and supports the intellectual and aesthetic tradition, the elite. Shils ridicules Macdonald's belief that "all past cultures were elite cultures" and that high culture is in decline because of the enormous growth of *kitsch,* and the absence of a strong cultural tradition. Yet Macdonald is entirely right, and this is precisely what is happening. We do not have any statistical means for deciding this question; but surely it must be plain to a truly disinterested observer that the mass output of culture, high, middle, and low, representing a mixture of commercial motives with plebian ideology, has created an atmosphere unfavorable to the life of the traditional elite. To avoid misunderstanding, it should be said that both individual talent and serious culture go on, but under constant threat of seduction and disorganization, and are often forced, out of the instinct for self-preservation, into greater isolation, alienation from the rest of the community, and lately, into academicism. An even more disruptive effect of mass and middle culture is the breakdown of traditional authority and standards, in all areas, including that of education itself, which is often invoked as the "countervaling force." The reason for this breakdown is not simply the existence of inferior products; in the past popular amusements in no way challenged serious work and often supplied it with a new source of vitality. Today, however, the merchandising of culture has created a

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new intellectual bureaucracy, still disoriented and divided, but ready to challenge the authority of the old elite, and with far greater resources for dispensing its own values—which are really mixed with highbrow values—to an ever growing audience. And it is ironically the growth of this audience that is triumphantly cited as evidence of intellectual progress.

It should be clear that the ideas and values of this country are actually in the hands of a cultural minority, an elite, but it is a new kind of elite, adapted to the needs of an industrial and egalitarian society. The old elite is only one small part of this new intellectual class, the rest of it being made up of middlebrow writers and thinkers, academic experts who are ignorant in most areas, cultural custodians who are dedicated to the classics but uncertain in their relation to new works, and that amorphous body of professional people who inhale and exhale the prevailing cultural modes. This, in short, is the American "establishment," and its character is seen most clearly in comparison with its counterpart in England. The English establishment, so long the envy of American intellectuals, is relatively homogeneous, centered in London, the intellectual capital, and takes for granted both its relation to tradition and the need for breaking new ground. The establishment in England has, to be sure, been criticized for being too stuffy, mostly by its own rebels, themselves very much a part of it, who are stimulated by the great energy and exoticism they find in America. Obviously, the English have their own problems, in their own way perhaps as great as ours, but the fact remains that England has not yet succumbed to the confusion, anti-intellectualism, and sheer vulgarity of the modern variety of plebianism that has discovered the possibility of getting cultured and rich by the same process. One of the most obvious benefits of such an establishment is intelligent government. In contrast to the situation in this country, English intellectuals have both a personal and a professional relation to the men who wield political power: indeed, they are all drawn from the same group, and however great their political and intellectual disagreements, they have a common sense of urgency and relevance. The proper question, as I see it, then, has to do not with the manner in which culture is spread—as in the old senseless argument over whether a man who listens to popular tunes has taken the first step toward Schoenberg—but with the makeup, the values, and the role of the American establishment.

The most significant and most provocative approach to the problems of American culture I have seen in the last decade is Richard

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Chase's recent book, *The Democratic Vista*.[3] I think Chase is wrong in many respects, but it is better to make mistakes than to be silent: and it must be said that in a time ruled by caution, Chase's bold approach to the subject is most admirable. The meaning of the book, therefore, lies not so much in its specific arguments as in its general stand, which reaffirms the need to keep alive what Chase calls the tradition of "cultural radicalism and humane avant-garde," and to resist the blandishments of the "middle way" that presents itself to us under so many different names, but always with an irresistable appeal to reality and democracy.

Chase's argument is put in the form of a dialogue in which the leading personae, each representing a typical cultural position, spout their views on everything from art to sex. A few supporting characters, most of them women, contribute flavor and transition. The hero is Ralph, obviously the author's mouthpiece, a sophisticated professor who speaks up for the radical tradition in American literature, which is by nature antithetic to "the formless middle way of feeling and thought." Ralph sums up his views in this way: "In order to keep up a steady dissent from the conformism and middlebrowism of the time, I have shown how little these are justified by the best traditions of American culture and literature." Ralph's foil, his Sancho Panza, is George, who impersonates the spirit of modulation and adaptation, and, in reaction against the intellectual wildness of the 'twenties and 'thirties, now has his mind safely tucked away in the *Realpolitik and Realkultur* of the times. "My generation learned," says George, "To distrust ideas such as those to which Ralph clings. . . . We became realists. . . . We found a justification for this cynicism (if that is what it was) in our discovery of the ordinary life. . . . We are wise in the ways of sex, of family life, of community activity." George will go far.

Ralph is the high-minded rebel, defending true culture against its enemies, but he remains a sweet and reasonable figure, an educator, who scolds and enlightens George as though they were in a permanent relation of teacher to student. Perhaps, in the absence of a true literary avant-garde, this is the fate of the rebel; even a radical criticism today tends to become academic, to base itself on intelligence rather than on new movements and to search for ancestral themes to justify its existence. Thus Chase—through the voice of Ralph—instead of taking our cultural predicament as part of the problems of modern culture in general, tries to relate it to the unique strains of American literature. This has certain unfortunate effects. For example, it confuses the issue to link,

3. Doubleday, $3.95.

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as Chase does, Whitman's use of certain democratic myths with middlebrowism today. And Chase also weakens his argument when he invokes the standard idea of pluralism in American thought as a source of vitality for serious criticism and advanced art.

Another flaw is the loose way in which Chase brandishes the terms highbrow, middlebrow, lowbrow. He even goes so far as to characterize all of English culture as middlebrow. It is true that lowbrowism in England has been mostly restricted to the popular level, while bohemian extremes have been delegated to the French. But this has very little to do with the idea of the false and the fabricated usually associated with the middlebrow. Chase also creates some historical confusion when he refers at one point to Stephen Crane as a middlebrow; and in speaking of writers like Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson, he uses the term lowbrow as a synonym for "anti-intellectual" or "primitive." In all fairness, however it must be said that there is wide disagreement over the usage of all these terms; and differences over their meaning often provide a convenient argument for those who are out to prove that the phenomena themselves have been invented by discontented critics. In this regard, the chief value of Chase's book is that he keeps his eye on what is happening, on the reality of the culture, however faulty may be the description of it.

Many terms are imperfectly defined, many questions unanswered. Perhaps one of the most important is the relation of cultural to political radicalism, of an avant-garde to other forms of rebelliousness. This question is most pertinent today because there is very little political radicalism that commands respect and almost no inclination among intellectuals to press in that direction. Chase offers the conjecture that in the long run "any sort of cultural radicalism separated from politics will grow bloodless and irrelevant to the perennial human questions"; but for the present "the point is that radicalism is a method, a polemical attitude, an attack. . . . A revolutionary politics or economics makes no sense as applied to contemporary America." Here again we seem to run up against verbal distinctions. In the strict sense of the terms, serious and experimental works in the past did exist without benefit of a revolutionary politics, and there is no reason to believe the two must go together. In fact, the one attempt to connect them in the 'thirties, under the slogans of a vulgarized Marxism, was disastrous, and its chief effect was to give radical sanction to the most conventional forms so long as they were earnest and comprehensible. (Even Leon Trotsky, it will be recalled, believed that in modern society the radical impulse naturally takes the form of bohemianism in art.) It is in a more fun-

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damental sense that we speak of radicalism in connection with the creative and critical mind, in the sense that it strives constantly both to connect and to detach itself from things as they are. In this respect, as T. S. Eliot observed, every new idea and work of art—not necessarily great, but genuine—is a criticism of the past. And of intellectuals generally it might be said that they must dissociate themselves from certain aspects of their society and their culture because they are morally compelled to relate themselves to ideal rather than to existing ways of life. Surely, it doesn't take a revolutionist to be critical of the fact that those who advocate the spread of culture usually do not object to watering it down in the process, or of the fact that young talent outside the popular market has a hard time steering a course between the old academicism and a new bohemianism that sounds like Rimbaud operating out of Madison Avenue.

The issues have been so clouded that nothing can be taken for granted. Under these circumstances, the restatement of what might properly be assumed becomes a revolutionary act. But I suppose the situation must continue so long as the establishment in America is torn between its loyalty to traditional standards and ideals and its stakes in an egalitarian culture. Hence it is safe to predict that the intellectual merry-go-round will go on.

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Herbert Marcuse

NOTES ON THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICAL LAWS

Karl R. Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism*[1] is dedicated to the "memory of the countless men and women of all creeds or nations or races who fell victim to the fascist and communist belief in Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny."

The concern with the role of political violence, expressed in this Dedication, appears in Popper's book in the framework of a discussion of historical and social theory. In the course of the discussion, certain theories emerge to which the tendency to violence seems to be germane, namely, those which believe in inexorable and predictable laws of history. Some of these theories—Popper calls them "holist"—couple this belief with the notion that the State, Society, or the Nation are "totalities" over, above, and other than the mere sum total of their component parts, governed by laws of their own, to which the individuals are subordinated. The notion of totality in turn implies, in these theories, the possibility of totalitarian control over all individual relationships, specific events, institutions, etc. Popper thus stipulates a connection between methodological and political totalitarianism: the former provides, as it were, the logical and philosophical justification for the latter. Consequently, a logical refutation of the former would prove the factual impossibility of the latter. Political totalitarianism would then be shown as "Utopian"—and this is indeed the result of Popper's argument—an argument which, as we shall see, does not involve much ingenuity. As an antidote against totalitarianism, Popper recommends a pluralistic, gradualistic, and "piecemeal" approach to history and society, which refrains from "holist" notions so conducive to holist policies and holist sacrifices to "historical destiny."

Before examining Popper's argument further, I wish to discuss briefly the context in which it appears. It is a philosophical, more exactly,

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a methodological context in which the application of wholesale violence is explained in terms of a specific philosophy of history and society. Moreover, responsibility is assigned to the philosophy of historical law and destiny (although perhaps not the entire responsibility), which includes, undifferentiated by Popper, the fascist ideology and the communist theory. And the same philosophy is held to be logically faulty, unscientific, and in this sense irrational. I wish to raise the question whether the philosophical context in which historical violence is discussed does not develop the problem on a level of misplaced abstractness, thus diverting attention from the real factors of violence, from its societal function, and from the historical means of combating it.

Now it is certainly true that a philosophy of history has frequently been used to justify the liquidation of countless individuals who, by their faith or origin, by their position in society, by their opinions and actions, were considered as standing in the way of historical destiny. Examples may be adduced from Robespierre's Republic of Virtue to the Stalinist terror. One might not stress unduly the concept of historical destiny if one goes further back and adds practically all crusades, inquisitions, religious wars—even those declared in the name of toleration and religious freedom. It is also true that Marxian theory contains the notion of inexorable laws of society—although here it is precisely the *abolition* of these *oppressive* laws which is the aim and the rationale of the socialist revolution. It is much less certain whether the fascist ideology has the idea of inexorable laws of history—rather the denial of history, acting against history, regression to "nature" are characteristic of fascism. But this is largely irrelevant to the question whether, in all these cases, belief in historical destiny really explains terror. I propose that it does not: where it was prevalent, it was derivative from and conditional upon other factors in such a sense that a discussion which neglects these factors abstracts from the essential and suggests an incorrect interpretation of the causes, the function, and the prospects of historical violence. If these factors are present (I shall presently try to indicate them), there is no philosophy of history which may not lend itself to the systematic use of violence. As the history of liberalism from the seventeenth to the present century shows, the gradualist and pluralist approach is no exception—be it only because of its incapacity to prevent violence and by its readiness (with good conscience) to meet violence with violence.

I admit that this last point can be conceded only if the indictment of mass extermination is not from the beginning restricted and made to conform with the standards and criteria of the society from whose

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position the indictment is leveled. In Popper's case, these standards call for a fundamental distinction between legal and extra-legal mass extermination: between war and civil war, invasion and police action, in a successful and in a failing revolution, by a legally constituted and a not yet thus constituted government.

But does not acceptance of these distinctions imply recognition that there are historically very different forms and functions of mass violence, which—while all morally repugnant and condemnable—have very different causes and aims? The question has direct bearing on Popper's analysis: because he abstracts from the real factors of mass violence, he arrives at a false generalization obliterating the political features of terror in the contemporary period and minimizing its scope and prospect.

The real factors of mass violence are those which, in the respective society, make for the suspension of the "normal" controls and of normal law and order. The facts are well known and a brief reminder will suffice. In the case of fascism, the expansionist policy of "rectifying" the peace settlements of 1919 and of gaining more *Lebensraum* for the defeated states could no longer be pursued within the framework of the established democratic system and its large labor opposition. The unprecedented degree of violence corresponded to the extent of sacrifices and costs imposed upon the population. The people must be tied to the regime with all conceivable means: share in the spoils and share in the guilt; they must also be compensated for their victimization. Here is perhaps the ground on which the "irrational" forces are released: sadistic cruelty, destructiveness, and stupidity—revenge against whatever and whomever can be blamed for the old and the new misery of the underlying population. Compared with these factors, the philosophy of "historical destiny" seems to be negligible. Indeed, rarely has an ideology been a more transparent rationalization, a more expendable by-product.

In the case of communism, the basic factors of the terror are of a very different nature. The mass exterminations accompanying the first Five Year Plan occurred in the course of the violent collectivization and industrialization, undertaken against a backward, apathetic, or hostile population. Even if one stretches the Marxian notion of inexorable laws of historical development to the extent that it stipulates advanced industrialization as an indispensable precondition for socialism, it will be hard to maintain that this notion played any decisive role in Stalinist policy. Rapid building up of the economic and military potential of Soviet society in order to enable it to withstand the "threat of

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capitalism" and especially of fascism appears as the driving force behind this policy, and no "holist" philosophy is required to explain it. The theoretical discussion was crushed, not consummated, by the Stalinist plan. As to the purges of the middle and late 'thirties and then again of the late 'forties: I cannot see how they are attributable to a philosophical concept by any stretch of the imagination.

These brief comments may serve to indicate one of the major defects of Popper's book. A philosophical analysis which remains abstract to the extent that it never reaches the historical dimension in which mass violence emerges and operates is of little value in explaining and combating it. I shall attempt to show that Popper's generalizations are theoretically untenable—but they also do violence to the empirical facts and events. To be sure, terror is and remains in all its forms and circumstances a crime against humanity—an instrument of domination and exploitation. This does not change the fact that terror has had very different historical functions and very different social contents: it has been used for the preservation of the status quo and for its overthrow, for the streamlining of a declining society and for the release of new political and economic forces. Understanding the historical function of terror may be an indispensable weapon for combating it. The horror of slaughter does not wipe out the difference between the Jacobin terror and that of the post-Thermidorian reaction, between the terror of the dying Commune and that against it, between the Red and the White terror—a difference which is *not* a subtle philosophical point but a struggle of opposing political forces that changed the course of history.

II

Popper's analysis of totalitarianism is part of his sweeping critique of historicism. The meaning which Popper gives to this term is strikingly unusual:

> . . . I mean by "historicism" an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the "rhythm" or the "pattern," the "laws" or the "trends" that underlie the evolution of history. . . . And I have not hesitated to construct arguments in its support which have never, to my knowledge, been brought forward by historicists themselves. I hope that, in this way, I have succeeded in building up a position really worth attacking.

The last statement deserves some attention before we take a closer look at this notion of historicism. What a strange method: to build up a position really worth attacking and then to attack it! Why does the

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critic have to construct the target of his attack? I would have passed over the statement as a mere manner of speech if I did not believe that this method is characteristic of much of contemporary philosophical analysis. In reading Popper's book, I often stopped and asked: against what is he really arguing? who has actually maintained what he is so efficiently destroying? And often I was unable to identify the attacked theory (especially since Popper is extremely sparing with references).

In the philosophical tradition, "historicism" has become a well defined term, referring to those schools of thought which emphasize the historical uniqueness and "equivalence" of cultures. Historicism thus implies a rather high degree of pluralism and relativism, perhaps most characteristically epitomized in Ranke's phrase that all historical periods are "*unmittelbar zu Gott.*" Neither predictability nor the idea of historical "laws" plays a central role in these theories. Certainly, it would be entirely unjustified to insist on conformity with lexicographical usage. However, I think that such a strange deviation from usage should have firmer grounds than a construction built from disparate elements of disparate theories. Popper's construction is general enough to include practically all theories which take history seriously, which see in it the "fate" of mankind: his opposition to historicism is in the last analysis opposition to *history*. And the construction is selective enough to enable him to establish a link between historicism and totalitarianism.

The book divides the whole of what is called "historicism" into two main types of theory: pro-naturalistic doctrines, which claim that the methods of physical science can, at least to a large extent, be applied to the social sciences, and anti-naturalistic doctrines, which deny such applicability and insist on a scientific method germane to the social sciences. Popper presents and criticizes both types of theories and concludes that neither one can lay claim to a rational and scientific theory of history allowing predictability. He sums up his main argument against the predictability of history as follows: the course of history is "strongly influenced" by the growth of human knowledge, but we cannot predict, by "rational or scientific methods," the future growth of scientific knowledge; consequently, we cannot predict the future course of history. By the same token, there cannot be a social science or a "theoretical history" corresponding to theoretical physics; there "can be no scientific theory of historical development serving as a basis for historical prediction." The fundamental aim of historicist method is therefore "misconceived; and historicism collapses." Popper's dictum of collapse seems to be somehow premature. He argues that a "theoretical history" corresponding in method and aim to theoretical physics is impossible—

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a statement which few "historicists" would contest. The essential difference between the method of the historical and that of the physical sciences has been one of the major points in the philosophical discussion since the nineteenth century, but one looks in vain for a discussion (or even mentioning) of those theoretical efforts which were decisive for the foundation, development, and critique of historicism: Droysen, Dilthey, Simmel, Windelband, Rickert, Troeltsch—to mention only a few. These are not merely additional names or references which may or may not be there; their analysis of conceptualization in the social and physical sciences and of the "rationality" of history has direct bearing on Popper's arguments. Failure to face their positions in full strength may account for much of the thinness and abstractness of Popper's discussion.

But apart from this failure, Popper's argument against historical predictability seems in itself inconclusive. To be sure, the growth of human knowledge has "strongly influenced" the course of history. However, as such a factor, it has in turn been historically conditioned. It seems that scientific knowledge has really influenced the course of history only as *accepted* knowledge, that is to say, if and when it corresponded to the needs and capabilities of society. The latter are facts and forces which operate in any given society as observable trends and tendencies, and these provide the ground for historical predictability—which is never more than projection of tendencies.

There are other theories which posit historical predictability and more rigid and sweeping "laws" of historical development. They are mostly cyclical theories, assuming a return of the pattern of the past. Ultimately, they are derived from the idea of the basic unchangeability of human nature, which asserts itself through all variations and innovations. Thucydides and Macchiavelli, Vico, Spengler and Toynbee may serve as examples. Their conception is fundamentally different from that according to which the laws of historical development all but preclude a return of the pattern of the past—so much so that they almost appear as the laws of human freedom, circumscribing the conditions for the exercise of human freedom, for the possibilities of change. Popper's presentation and critique obliterates the decisive difference between these types of theories by submerging both in the constructed syndrome of "historicism." We shall presently return to this point, after a further brief examination of the syndrome.

III

Popper's abstract methodological discussion comes to life when it reveals its concrete political implications. His most telling arguments

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against historicism are in the last analysis political arguments, and his own position is in the last analysis a political position. The political dimension is not merely superimposed upon the methodological: the latter rather reveals its own political content. The awareness of this relationship and its outspoken development is a rewarding feature of Popper's book.

The political implications of the critique of historicism center on the notion of "holism." (The word itself seems to revolt against its formation!) According to this notion (which Popper attributes to the anti-naturalistic doctrines),

> social groups must never be regarded as mere aggregates of persons. The social group is *more* than the mere sum total of its members, and it is also *more* than the mere sum total of the merely personal relationships existing at any moment between any of its members.

Thus far this is a very harmless notion, and one may doubt whether even the most radical empiricist would seriously deny it. Popper goes on to distinguish two meanings of the word "whole": (1) those properties or aspects of a thing which make it appear an organized structure rather than a mere "heap," and (2) "the totality of *all* the properties or aspects of a thing, and especially of *all* the relations holding between its constituent parts" (my italics). The first meaning, used in Gestalt theory, is acceptable to Popper, while he rejects the second as entirely inapplicable to the social sciences. It is rejected because a whole in this sense can never be described and observed, since "all description is necessarily selective." Nor can such a totality ever be the object "of any activity, scientific or otherwise." Popper links methodological and political totalitarianism: "It is for many reasons quite impossible to control all, or 'nearly' all" the relationships embraced by society, if only "because with every new control of social relations we create a host of new social relations to be controlled." "In short, the impossibility is a *logical* impossibility" (my italics); logically impossible because the attempt would lead to an "infinite regression"—as it would in the study of society as a whole. Popper himself seems to be somewhat uneasy; he adds a footnote which says that "Holists may hope that there is a way out of this difficulty by denying the validity of logic which, they think, has been superseded by dialectic" and he says that he has tried to "block this way" in his article "What is Dialectic" (*Mind,* vol. 49 N.S., pp. 403 ff). I do not know who the "holists" might be that entertain such hope and that "may" deny the validity of logic, but the reference to the dialectic suggests that Popper is thinking of Hegel and the Marxists who are thus charged with an illogical "totalitarian intuition"

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—although even the "holist" Stalin emphatically asserted the validity of (traditional) logic. At stake is not the validity of logic but the adequacy of the logic applied. But the notion that society is more than the mere aggregate of its parts and relations does not imply that all or "nearly all" public and private relations within society must be analyzed in order to comprehend the "structure" of a society. On the contrary, the hypothesis that such a structure prevails and asserts itself in and through all institutions and relations (defining and determining them) does not preclude but calls for a "selective" analysis—one which focuses on the *basic* institutions and relations of a society (a distinction which must, of course, be demonstrated and justified logically as well as empirically). Similarly, for the totalitarian control of society it is not necessary to control directly *all* or "nearly all" relations because control of the *key* positions and institutions assures control of the whole. Certainly, every new control creates new social relations to be controlled, but far from being an impossible infinite regression, this constellation perpetuates and propels the controls once secured in the key positions and relations: the "new" relations are preshaped and predetermined. (It might be necessary to point out that these comments do not imply or suggest that totalitarian control, once established, is unbreakable, but that breaking it depends on changing the very basis of totalitarian society.)

If the critique of totalitarianism, instead of "constructing" its target, would look at the actual theories and at the reality of totalitarianism, it could hardly assert that totalitarianism is a logical impossibility. Popper cites Mannheim's proposition that "the power of the State is bound to increase until the State becomes nearly identical with society"; he calls this proposition a "prophecy" and the "intuition" expressed in it the "totalitarian intuition." Now I think it is rather obvious that the cited passage has long since ceased to be a "prophecy" and has become a statement of fact. Moreover, one may criticize Mannheim on many grounds, but to count him among the "holists" and to charge him with the "totalitarian intuition" is to confuse an analysis of observable trends with their advocacy and justification.

This confusion is characteristic of Popper's concept of "holism," which covers and denounces equally theories with a totalitarian and those with an anti-totalitarian "intuition." By the same token, the concept obliterates the fundamental differences between the critical notion of inexorable historical laws, which sees in these laws the feature of an "immature" and oppressive society, and the conservative notion, which justifies these laws as "natural" and unchangeable. The idea that the Nation or the State or the Society are totalities over and above the

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individuals who must be subordinated to the inherent laws governing these totalities has often justified tyranny and the enslavement of men by the powers that be. But the category of "holism" is also applied by Popper to the opposite theoretical tradition, exemplified by Marxian theory. According to this theory, the appearance of the Nation and the State and the Society as separate totalities reflects only a specific economic structure of class society, and a free society involves the disappearance of this "holism." Popper joins the two incompatible theories with what he calls "Utopianism" and thus establishes the alliance of Plato and Marx—a fantastic syndrome playing an important part in his demonstration of the "unholy alliance" between historicism and Utopianism. The latter notion soon reveals its concrete political content:

> . . . we find historicism very frequently allied with just those ideas which are typical of holistic or Utopian social engineering, such as the idea of "blueprints for a new order," or of "centralized planning."

For Popper, Plato was a pessimistic Utopian holist: his blueprint aimed at arresting all change; Marx was an optimist who "predicted, and tried actively to further" the Utopian ideal of a society without political and economic coercion.

We do not wish to dwell again on the semantics of the term Utopianism: as the word loses more and more of its traditional content, it becomes an instrument of political defamation. Industrial civilization has reached the stage where most of what could formerly be called Utopian now has a *"topos"* among the real possibilities and capabilities of this civilization. Moreover, ideas and efforts, which once were "Utopian," have been playing an increasingly decisive part in the conquest of nature and society, and there is awareness of the tremendous forces which may be released and utilized through the encouragement of "Utopian" thought. In the Soviet Union, science fiction writers are being taken to task for lagging behind science in their dreams and phantasies and they are told to "get their imagination off the ground" (*New York Times,* July 9, 1958). Political interest in maintaining the status quo rather than logical or scientific impossibility today makes real possibilities appear as Utopian. Popper lends weight to his attack on Utopianism by again "constructing" the theory he attacks rather than criticizing the theory as it actually is. It is hardly justifiable to call Marx's brief outline of the initial institutional prerequisites for socialism a blueprint for the "social engineering" of an ideal society (he did not make centralized planning the distinguishing feature of socialism, and he never designated socialism as an "ideal society").

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But this may be irrelevant exegesis: what really matters to Popper is the argument against the "holistic" idea of social change, i.e., the idea that "social experiments, in order to be realistic, must be of the character of Utopian attempts at remodeling the whole of society." We have already indicated the basis for Popper's rejection of this idea: his contention that "the whole of society" is a logically and scientifically untenable notion. Against it, Popper advocates the "piecemeal" approach to social experiments, concentrating on the fight against "definite wrongs, against concrete forms of injustice or exploitation, and avoidable suffering such as poverty or unemployment." He supports this position by a pluralistic philosophy of history. According to it, one may interpret history in terms of class struggles, or of religious ideas, or of races, or of the struggle between the "open" and the "closed" society, etc.:

All these are more or less interesting points of view, and *as such* perfectly unobjectionable. But historicists do not present them as such: they do not see that there is necessarily a plurality of interpretations which are fundamentally on the same level of both suggestiveness and arbitrariness (even though some of them may be distinguished by their *fertility*—a point of some importance).

The parenthesis contains indeed a point of some importance—so much so that the concept of "fertility," if elaborated, may well cancel the complete relativism expressed in the preceding passage. And as to the historicists not seeing this relativism: the view expressed by Popper has been one of the most representative positions of traditional historicism.

IV

Popper has herewith restated some of the philosophical foundations of classical liberalism; Hayek looms large in the supporting footnotes, and the critique of historicism is largely a justification of liberalism against totalitarianism. Liberalism and totalitarianism appear as two diametrically opposed systems: opposed in their economics and politics as well as in their philosophy. The question is: does this picture correspond to the actual relation between liberalism and totalitarianism? It is a vital question, and especially vital for a genuine and effective critique of anti-liberal philosophies. One does not have to accept the Marxian thesis that free, competitive, private capitalism leads, precisely by virtue of its inherent normal development, to totalitarianism (i.e., increasing centralization of economic and political power, ultimately exercised by the state) in order to suspect that a liberalistic society is not immune to totalitarian trends and forces. The tendency towards the

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increasing power of the State is sufficiently noticeable in societies which are not exactly chaarcterized by a predominance of "holist" doctrines and in which the "piecemeal" rather than the totalitarian approach prevailed. Were liberal gradualism and pluralism perhaps derived from the belief in a "law" no less "inexorable" than that assumed by the "holists" namely, the law of the market, expressing the harmony between the freely competing private interests and the general welfare? Has the market equalized or aggravated the initial inequality and the conflicts of interests generated by it? Has free competition, economic and intellectual, prevented or promoted the concentration of power and the corrosion of individual liberties? Have not these trends, in the democracies too, reached the point where the State is increasingly called upon to regulate and protect the whole? The existence of countervailing powers seems to be of little avail if they themselves impel centralization, and if the opposition is in the same boat as the power which it opposes. Moreover, industrial civilization has, at the national and international level, so closely interrelated economic and political, local and large scale, particular and general processes that effective "piecemeal social engineering" appears as affecting the whole structure of society and threatening a fundamental change. Whether or not these trends lead to terroristic totalitarianism, depends, not on a philosophy of history and society but on the existence of social groups willing and strong enough to attack the economic and political roots of totalitarianism. These roots are in the *pre*-totalitarian era.

If these are really the observable trends, then the abstract opposition between liberalism and totalitarianism implied in Popper's presentation does not adequately express the state of affairs. Instead, the latter rather seems to suggest a "dialectical" relationship between two historical periods of one and the same form of society. Popper's rejection of dialectics is not incidental: an anti-dialectical logic is essential to his argument. It is so because dialectical logic is throughout permeated with what he designates as "historicism": its method and its notions are shaped in accordance with the historical structure of reality. Far from "denying the validity of logic," dialectical logic intends to rescue logic by bridging the gap between the laws of thought and those governing reality—a gap which is itself the result of the historical development. Dialectical logic attempts to accomplish this task by bringing the two manifestations of reality to their actual common denominator, namely, *history*. In its metaphysical form, this is also the core of Hegel's dialectic: Subject and Object, Mind and Nature—the two traditional "substances"—are from the beginning conceived as an antagonistic

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unity, and the universe as the concrete development of their interrelation. This undertaking involved a redefinition of the forms and categories of traditional logic: they lost their mode of "yes" or "no," "either-or" and assumed that "ambiguous," dynamic, even contradictory character which makes them so ridiculous to the protagonists of purity but which corresponds so closely to reality. The realistic character of dialectical thought comes to fruition in the interpretation of history. The latter may best be illustrated by contrasting it with Popper's view that historians are interested in "actual, singular, or specific events, rather than in laws or generalizations." In contrast to the opposition between "singular" and "law," "specific" and "general" expressed in Popper's statement, the dialectical conception holds that the actual, specific, singular event becomes comprehensible only if it is understood as constituted by the "general," as the particular manifestation of a "law." And this "general" is something very concrete and demonstrable, namely, the society in which the specific events occur at a specific stage of its development. The dialectical notion of historical laws implies no other "destiny" than that which men create for themselves under the conditions of unmastered nature and society. The less a society is rationally organized and directed by the collective efforts of free men, the more will it appear as an independent whole governed by "inexorable" laws. The manner in which men explain and exploit nature, and the societal institutions and relationships which they give themselves are actual and specific historical events, but events which occur on a ground already prepared, on a base already built. Once institutionalized, each society has its framework of potentialities defining the scope and direction of change. Historical determinism has freedom as a constitutive element: the latter is defined and confined by the "whole"—but the whole can be (and constantly is) redefined, so much so, that the historical process cannot even be regarded as irreversible. There are "laws," there is historical *logic* in the sequence of ancient slave society, feudalism, "free" industrial capitalism, state capitalism and contemporary socialism: one emerges *within* the other and develops, under the prevalent conditions, its own laws of functioning as a whole system of material and intellectual culture—a demonstrable "unity." However, these very laws do not allow predictability of progress. The present situation indicates clearly enough that a return to original barbarism appears as a historical possibility. Again: certainly not as an inexorable "destiny" in a cycle of growth and decay, progress and regression, etc. but as a man-made destiny, for which responsibility can be assigned and which can be explained (as failure, impotence, even impossibility to act otherwise)—

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explained in terms of the structure of the established society and the forms of control, manipulation, and indoctrination required for the preservation of this structure. It then appears that the alternative to progressive barbarism (and there have always been alternatives!) may well involve a change in the *structure* of society, in other words, a "holist" change which is Popper's real *bête noire*.

Here, I suggest, is the driving force behind Popper's attack on historicism. It is, I believe, in the last analysis a struggle against history—*not* spelled with a capital H, but the empirical course of history. Any attempt to rescue the values of liberalism and democracy must account for the emergence of a society that plays havoc with these values. At the attained stage, this development threatens to obliterate the difference between war and peace, between military and civilian drill, between technical and intellectual manipulation, between the rationality of business and that of society, between free and dependent enterprise, privacy and publicity, truth and propaganda. These tendencies are afflictions of the whole: originating from the center (i.e., the basic societal institutions), they penetrate and shape all spheres of existence. Moreover, they are not confined to totalitarian countries; they are not attributable to a "holist" or "Utopian" philosophy; and they have asserted themselves within the framework of pluralistic institutions and gradualist policies. Contemporary society is increasingly functioning as a rational whole which overrides the life of its parts, progresses through planned waste and destruction, and advances with the irresistable force of nature—*as if* governed by inexorable laws. Insistence on these irrational aspects is, not betrayal of the liberalistic tradition, but the attempt to recapture it. The "holism" which has become reality must be met by a "holist" critique of this reality.

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BOOKS

REALITIES AND FICTIONS

THE HOUSEBREAKER OF SHADY HILL. By John Cheever. Harper & Bros. $3.00.
BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S. By Truman Capote. Random House. $3.00.
THE BELL. By Iris Murdoch. Viking. $4.50.
THE LONG DREAM. By Richard Wright. Doubleday. $3.95.
NIKI. By Tibor Dery. Doubleday. $2.95.
THE VOYEUR. By Alain Robbe-Grillet. Grove. $1.75.

For a reviewer to make the most of a fiction chronicle, he should come prepared with a "binding theme" and see to it that the novels stay bound. I am as ready to play this game as the next man, but this time the odds are most unfavorable.

Shall the novelists be chastized because they lack values and are not sufficiently mature? This might seem presumptuous from someone of my years, since nowadays maturity is the possession of the young. Find some common technique or idea in the books at hand? Yes; but how is that to be done with a parable about a Hungarian dog, a melodrama about Southern Negroes, a batch of *New Yorker* stories, and an experimental French novel that I probably don't understand?

There seems no choice but to fall back upon a few remarks about each of the books, treating them independently, as perhaps they should be treated. While reading them, I did consider the gambit that each of the writers was responding in his own way to a particular sense of reality, very different from that of the others, and that consequently . . . . But you will reply that this fact, holding true for all works of fiction, is hardly enough to distinguish six novels from any other six; and, alas, you will be right.

John Cheever is one of the *New Yorker's* most canny and skillful hands, an expert at regulating the delicate psychic relations between the magazine and its public. Undeceived as to the troubles of suburbia, Cheever stands before his readers somewhat like a cautious therapist making sure the patients don't fly into a rage and tear apart the modern furniture.

The stories in *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill* have a recurrent pattern. They start with a release of some trouble in the life of a

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suburbanite: the hero is short of cash, he wants to neck with the babysitter, he is ready to vomit up a throatful of boredom. Reading the first page or two leads to a surge of expectation—the sense of danger is genuine enough, reality is breaking past the world of gadgets and ranch houses, even past the surface of Cheever's greying prose. But, alas, this reality proves to be a canary, not an eagle, and a canary soon caged. The adorable fantasy of escape is squashed in a mild whimsy of resignation; the emotion that had been pinched into vitality becomes a mere dribble of weariness. And though defeat may well be the greatest of literary subjects, Cheever never allows his characters to face either the desperateness or dignity of defeat: he murders their vital core before they have a chance to.

Cheever really knows a great deal about suburban life; but he cheats. He systematically refuses to face the meaning of the material he has himself brought to awareness and then suppressed. A toothless Thurber, he connives in the cowardice of contemporary life; the resignation which constitutes his stock of wisdom is nothing but advice to his readers that, dying slowly, they also die quietly.

Truman Capote, growing older, is also getting better. *Breakfast at Tiffany's,* a slight thing but neither precious nor exhibitionist, rests upon true observation of post-war New York life. And for the first time in Capote's work, there is a genuine interest in human character, *someone else's* character, for its own sake.

Miss Holiday Golightly (but why do writers have to use such names? why not a good simple name like, say, Emma Wodehouse?)—Holly, as her friends call her, is an original. A few other novelists have caught glimpses of her, notably Vance Bourjaily, but Capote handles her with a special expertness: she is exactly right for his brilliantly feline sensibility.

Holly is a new kind of brownstone girl. She glistens with the latest Manhattan sophistication but is also very *gauche* and ignorant; she sleeps with many but doesn't seem really interested in sex. A strangely feverish post-war figure, she combines amorality and innocence in a way that would startle a father confessor. She reaches a terrifying ultimate in rootlessness: the human creature without bonds, notions, responsibilities, delusions. Her doorbell reads *Miss Holiday Golightly, Traveling*—as if she had just been perusing Georg Simmel's essay on the stranger. Her one great attraction is her candor, the candor of a nihilism so naive as to seem indigenously American. "I'm always top banana," she says, "in the shock department."

Capote sets her up very well: habits, conversation, milieu. His

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style is annoying in its Broadway familiarity, but at the beginning one does not feel this to be a serious blemish, if only because there is always Holly, popping in and out of sight, to hold one's attention. The trouble comes, as always with Capote, when he has to get his picture to move; and then he rings in an Okie husband, a trip to Africa and other dime-store exotica. The first part of the novel is both amusing and keen; later, you might as well be in the movies.

American lady novelists can be threatening, especially if they put you in their books, but Miss Iris Murdoch, born in Dublin and living in Oxford, is something else: she is formidable. Her novel *The Bell,* with its complex structure and elaborate network of implication, is meant to be formidable; so too are the ideas that visibly twist themselves through the action, for Miss Murdoch has a philosophically trained mind.

The Bell concerns a community of lay Anglicans, a motley of people not quite fit for either world, the secular or monastic. There are obvious possibilities for comedy in attacking a group of this sort, and Miss Murdoch seizes upon some of them, notably in a series of deadpan sermons that the characters deliver to each other.

Soon, however, it becomes clear that the order of reality to be encountered in this novel is several removes from any that might be readily assimilated to common human experience, for it is the kind of novel in which meaning is to emerge not so much from the foreground action as from a design of suggestion traced behind the action. What is finally to matter is not the living trait of this character or the credibility of that scene, but a resultant of symbolic implication (in behalf of which there is much to-do about sunken bells and ancient legends). A pageant is unfolded in which every step is measured for significance and behind which there flash a series of cognitive signals—signals that tell us, impressively but predictably, that pride can nestle in piety, that the world clings to those who would flee it, that the desire for perfection is but a hair's breadth from sin.

As a piece of fiction *The Bell* is somber, languid and heavy from overcontrivance. About midway through the book, however, Miss Murdoch displays a rare novelistic gift: she writes convincingly, without rant or affectation, about love. One of her central figures is a not-too-bright but very likable girl married to a domineering scholar; the fears and yearnings of this driven creature mattered more to me than all of Miss Murdoch's Wrought Complexities. Still more remarkable is the grave and humane tenderness with which she presents the leader of the community, a man who suffers from a homosexual impulse he can neither release nor suppress. Miss Murdoch persuades one to feel, not merely

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believe, that the emotions of homosexual love are essentially like those of heterosexual love; and this—given the reality, as distinct from the pretense, of modern attitudes toward this matter—seems a notable achievement.

Miss Murdoch ought to write herself a simple story about the ravages of love, not in an eccentric community but in a triangle—any triangle.

No great critical powers are needed to detect the faults of Richard Wright's new novel *The Long Dream*. The writing is crude; symbolic effects are sometimes telegraphed or needlessly explained; an effort to infuse Freudian depth through italicized dream reveries proves embarrassing; the main incidents are melodramatic; and Wright's conception of life in Mississippi takes no account of recent changes. For him the Deep South is, and perhaps must always be, a place of terror.

The Long Dream seems calculated to invite stock responses from reviewers, perhaps because it can so easily be taken for a stock novel. Some will use it to preach sermons on the death of naturalism. Others will say, as one enlightened Negro writer already has in the *New York Times*, that Wright, long exiled in Paris, has lost touch with the realities of the South. And there will surely be a review by a particularly bright fellow that will demonstrate Wright to be the victim of an obsession with violence, which he projects upon a stereotyped vision of the South. . . .

So let me offer a bit of testimony. I found *The Long Dream* frequently exciting and occasionally moving, a book not to be judged by impersonal standards, for it is an outcry of pain, much more so than *Native Son* or *Black Boy*. Perhaps for the first time and perhaps just because conditions in the South are beginning to change, Wright has really let go with all of his feelings: with all the moral bitterness, sexual shame and pride behind the bitterness, rage and fear.

The reality pressing upon this novel is a nightmare of remembrance. When a liberal journalist writes that despite the prevalence of bias there has been an improvement in the South, that sort of judicious estimate constitutes discourse among the whites and, perhaps, a small minority of Negroes. But what has it to do with the way Negroes feel? About this we know very little and would be well advised not to nourish preconceptions, for it may well be that their feelings are finally closer to Wright's rasping outcry than to the modulated tones of some younger Negro writers. Even after living in Paris for many years, Wright must know more about the experience of Mississippi Negroes, their secret inner heart-view, than most other people, black or white. At the

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very least, *Wright can remember,* and what he remembers other Negroes must also remember. Perhaps by now the terror, violence and humiliation that swirl through his pages are things of the past, even in Mississippi; but men whose lives have been scarred by suffering have to live with their past, so that it too becomes part of the reality of the present.

Despite obvious faults, *The Long Dream* contains many pages that merit admiration on strictly literary grounds. The talk is often superb. There are vivid scenes: Negro boys edging into a circus, the central figure, Fishbelly, collecting rents on a Saturday morning in a Negro slum, a bang-up burial for victims of a dance hall fire. And Wright has created one superb and memorable figure, Tyree, a Negro undertaker who half the time is a shuffling good nigger and the other half rages with hatred for everything white.

Raw and bruised as it is, *The Long Dream* satisfies the first requirement of fiction: it lives, it affects the shape of one's emotions. There may be two or three other Negro writers in America who are more polished than Wright, but beside him they seem, inevitably, like boys looking up to a man.

Niki is the first work by the Hungarian writer, Tibor Dery, to be translated into English. It is a slight fable about the sufferings of a dog transported from the freedom of the countryside to the constrictions of the city; in the background the dog's master, a "liberal" Communist, is gradually humiliated and then jailed by the Budapest authorities. Dery is clearly a writer of intelligence; his casual remarks, undercutting the whole Communist ethos, are very clever; and he has managed, with some finesse, to preserve the surface integrity of his fable. Still, the book is disappointing. Unless you happen to be a fanatical animal lover, it is hard to accept the implied equivalence between the troubles of a dog and the imprisonment of a human being. Perhaps the difficulty is that the order of reality behind the novel is some sort of secret compact between Dery and his readers, to which outsiders cannot gain entry. During the Hungarian "thaw" *Niki* achieved an enormous success, and the knowing Budapest reader must have found many thrusts against the regime that escaped me. In any case, nothing in the book is as moving as the fact that its author is at present serving a nine year prison term for his part in the Hungarian revolution.

Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Voyeur* is an example of the "anti-novel novel," and as such it comes with an elaborate theoretical equipage. Robbe-Grillet writes (*Evergreen Review,* #3) that he wishes to dismiss "the old myth of 'depth,'" the assumption that a meaning is to be

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found in a depicted relationship between objects and/or events. *"Profundity,"* he writes in a sentence as shallow as it is sparkling, "has functioned like a trap in which the writer captures the universe to hand it over to society." What Robbe-Grillet wants is the chair and not the "signification" of the chair, for "the world is neither significant nor absurd. It *is,* quite simply." Quite simply!

Roland Barthes (*Evergreen* #5) gives a more sustained explanation:

Description for Robbe-Grillet is always 'anthological'—a matter of presenting the object as if in a mirror, as if it were in itself a *spectacle,* permitting it to make demands on our attention without regard for its relation to the dialectic of the story . . . The object has no being beyond *phenomenon*: it is not ambiguous or allegorical . . . A slice of tomato in an automat sandwich, described according to this method, constitutes an object without heredity, without associations, and without references . . . and refusing with all the stubbornness of its *there*ness to involve the reader in an *elsewhere*. . . .

As one might expect, these writers look for support in certain kinds of contemporary painting which seem also to represent the object in its *there*ness, without volunteering any value other than that which may reside in the visual moment.

But one is entitled to wonder: what principle of selection guides Robbe-Grillet in choosing one object for description rather than another? (An "anthological" description obviously implies selection.) Why a tomato rather than a cucumber? From certain points of view, this is by no means a trivial choice. And is not the act of choice necessarily dependent upon some bias of meaning, with its "heredity" and "associations," regardless of whether the writer is aware of this fact? M. Barthes's apparently casual reference to the position of the slice of tomato —that it lies within an *automat* sandwich—supplies it with a complex series of "depth" associations, indeed, with an entire historical aura.

For a painting it may be enough that the principle of selection be the visual satisfaction that can be had simply from looking at a reproduced version of an object, though here too one might wonder whether the object can exist on the plane of *there*ness without leading the observer to some *elsewhere*. But things would seem to be quite different in literature, among other reasons because the verbal description of the object, no matter how effective, can seldom be as complete and self-contained an aesthetic unit as can its representation in paint.

As it happens, the reality of Robbe-Grillet's writing is quite different from the claims of his theory. The compulsive anthologizing of events and objects directs our attention not to the surface of things,

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not to mere phenomena, but—it seems almost perverse—to possible clues as to meaning, response, emotion; and the fewer clues we have, the more are we driven to hunt for them. Nor is this comic shifting of direction unique in modern literature. When we read Virginia Woolf's *The Waves,* we are so thoroughly immersed in the flow of psychic sensation and reflection that we soon find ourselves seeking desperately for guide-points of event; we wish to make whole again the universe of conduct she has split into a radical duality. Reading *The Waves,* as it keeps immersing us in depth, turns our attention to surfaces; reading *The Voyeur,* which confines itself to surfaces, turns our attention to depth.

The Voyeur, in any case, is not merely an "anthologized" string of described objects; it has a plot of sorts. And no sooner is plot in evidence than there must be a recourse to ideas, preconceptions, inflections of emotion. So that it is simply not true, as Barthes writes, that "the work of Robbe-Grillet is susceptible to no thematic index whatever." Robbe-Grillet might protest that we are thrusting upon him that very incubus of meaning which he seeks to discard; but short of inflicting lobotomies upon his readers, he will have to put up with the fact that in coming to his books they inevitably bring with them an heredity. Joyce demanded that his readers give him their future; Robbe-Grillet, more extravagant, demands their past.

The novel itself is more interesting than the theories that surround it. Robbe-Grillet is skillful at evoking moods of anxiety (as one might expect in a writer distrustful of "depth"). Incidents repeat themselves crazily in the way they do in some experimental films, thereby creating a kind of epistemological disturbance; the chaotic mental references of his protagonist are presented as if they were actual happenings or as if they were indistinguishable from actual happenings. Though severely limited by the writer's programmatic avoidance of emotion, the result is a novel with moments of considerable power—but a power that is primarily psychological.

All of which suggests that reality—in this case, the spontaneous human striving for a unity of perception and comprehension—has a way of revenging itself upon those who go too far in violating it. And that, for the moment, seems enough of a moral.

Irving Howe

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POETRY CHRONICLE

A PLACE TO STAND. By David Wagoner. Indiana University Press. $2.75.
THE DARK HOUSES. By Donald Hall. Viking. $3.00.
A CAGE OF SPINES. By May Swenson. Rinehart. $3.75.
95 POEMS. By E. E. Cummings. Harcourt, Brace. $4.00.
SELECTED POEMS AND NEW. José Garcia Villa. McDowell, Obolensky. $5.00.

A second book of poems is a greater challenge, perhaps, even than a second novel. The question of when to stop, of how much to include or reject or postpone that solves itself in the composition and completion of a prose work, haunts until the very end the process of assembling a collection of verse. It is easy to make mistakes on the order of publishing too much too soon, or of being swayed too much (perhaps half out of gratitude for a reasonably intelligent press) by some delineation of "tendencies" that a reviewer has chosen to praise or blame. And then there is the problem of a possible new phase or direction to be entered or taken; a poet manages to make significant statements about the world (as opposed to individual poems in the sense of their being "objects" or "productions" however highly valued) only by building an *oeuvre,* by consistently associating a voice with a set of real concerns. What the novelist can make of the book as the fundamental unit of enterprise and endeavor, the poet must somehow contrive to distribute between the discrete poem, on the one hand, and the whole corpus of work, on the other. By and large, the single volume of poetry is not comparable to the novel as a piece of accomplishment. But since any poet's first book is often more a display of his voice than a decisive indication of his concerns (as in the case of W. S. Merwin's first two books, for example), the second collection of poems forms the real foundation of the *oeuvre,* rather than merely its plot and cornerstone.

Three good poets have recently confronted the problem of a second book in markedly different ways. David Wagoner's *A Place to Stand* seems to bear out certain promises of technique and intention made implicitly by his first collection, but to limit and refine a talent for writing one kind of poem, rather than for striking out toward distant prospects. It is a lovely book, however, precisely because of the success of its self-knowledge: there are very few poems that don't come off, and none that seem to have wandered in from another book (perhaps acknowledged by the fact that the regulation thirty-odd poems are not arranged in sub-headed sections). Mr. Wagoner's kind of poem takes a story, a ceremonial occasion, even an incipient cliché, and makes it the object

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of an earnest and serious wit; it is a cadet branch (and a good deal less played out) of one of W. H. Auden's lines, and "News from the Court" is a typical scion. In it, the poet asks in re his Queen's *accouchement*

Will it be prince, or princess, or still-birth?
What's the most regal answer to a bite?
How many fathoms deep is mother of pearl?
If the watchman says, "Ahem," how goes the night?

His "The Hero with One Face" relates of himself:

They told me gently who I was.

It scarcely mattered. I lay down
And ate the lotos, kissed my crown,
And gazed at Ozma, Beatrice,
And sighed, and was content with this.

And in "Spring Song," "Memento Mori," "'Tan Ta Ra, cries Mars . . .'" there is the same cool removal from the poem's subject, on the one hand, and engagement in its attitude, on the other; these are proclaimed openly at the end of the last of the aforementioned: "The raggedy-hafted Mars goes forth, with stars on his heels, / To battle, twitching our dust behind him like a gown."

Mr. Wagoner has a great deal of control over his diction, and often when one thinks that he is going to stumble into a posture, or drown himself in an echo, he will recover. Thus the almost overly Yeatsian "Epitaph" is saved from mere hand-me-down Crazy-Janeism by the right gag at the right time: "I kept / Great bitterness in my head / While she grew up, grew down, grew fur, / Or froze upon a bed." If a poem like "Murder Mystery" perhaps gets out of hand by almost parodying its author's characteristic manner ("'We did it.' scream the butler and the maid"), and if the title poem and "Credo Adoration" seem to move toward a speculative kind of verse not overly suited to his rhetoric, Mr. Wagoner nevertheless manages to stake out his own claim and to mine it efficiently. The ore assays well.

Donald Hall's *The Dark Houses* is a considerably more ambitious kind of second book than is David Wagoner's. It represents a turn of attention to the American scene of Sherwood Anderson and Edgar Lee Masters mocked and betrayed even more, we are to assume, by recent history. The "dark houses" of the title are those whose occupants "make their houses jails" and who "will take / No risk of freedom for the

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appetite . . ." In one sense, it has taken Mr. Hall a deal of courage to set out such a program of social satire for himself (the first half of his book is devoted to it): he is, in the view of the more simple-minded publicists of poetry in the larger weekly reviewing media, an academic poet. This means, I suppose, that he should be thought of as confining his concerns to those exemplified in his excellent "Sestina" in the second part of the book (only the skill of the best poems of his first book rescue what would look to be an exercise in an overly modish form), and that he should leave the crying out against the cities to the self-dramatists that these same critics marshal against him. But the whole notion of "academic" poetry is probably based on a rather mindless and empty distinction; we might say rather that the risk Mr. Hall has taken is one of real vulgarity, of selling his own good taste short.

I must confess that I am not happy about the outcome. It may be that the weak poems in the first section of the book tend often to employ a syllabic (and thus, inaudibly), rhymed verse with which Mr. Hall does not seem really at home. Or it may be rather that in trying to render cliches in the proper light, he falls to using them, as in "Mr. and Mrs. Billings": " 'Your wife,' the doctor said / 'Will be dead / In approximately twelve weeks.' / His left shoe creaks, / Thought Mr. Billings; and why does he look / Like a doctor in a book / Or a cigarette ad?" In any case, he is not writing with the same intelligence as when he talks of Ted,

> *The clever cremite,*
> *Whose cave has comforts like a single bed,*
> *Books, records, pictures, and a reading light;*
> *He cons himself; the text is in his head.*
> *"Who's worth the time?" said Annie. She was right.*

"Oysters and Hermits," from which this is quoted, is I think much better than almost anything in Mr. Wagoner's book; it represents, along with "David Hume," "The Morning Porches," "The Presences of Death" and sections of "Three Poems for Edward Munch," a firm, mature and authoritative talent recognizable from the poet's *Exiles and Marriages*. Mr. Hall's affinities are much more for the manner of Messrs. Larkin and Amis than has been remarked upon; when one of his personae cries out, it can be monstrously funny, as in the case of a tailor vowing revenge on his customers: "Tweed handkerchiefs! Left-handed / Shirts out of turnip skin! / Dogs' bones of silk! Rolled hats / For Uncles . . ."

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But one must conclude that the best poetry in *The Dark Houses* is what one misses from its characteristic pieces. "Springdale must go" screamed Harold Rosenberg of the small town in these pages last fall, and perhaps that is all there is to be said on the subject. One can only hope that the attempt to deal with it in Mr. Hall's current book represents a short blind alley jutting out from the course of a long and distinguished body of work.

May Swenson appears to have done less winnowing in preparing her second volume, *A Cage of Spines,* than have either of the above-mentioned poets. Her collection is both larger and more variously inclusive than the others, and while she has allowed a number of real trifles to find their way into a company by no means trifling and often profoundly impressive, her marked personal manner ranging over a wide field of possibilities seems to justify a good deal of wandering. For it is a manner of looking at things, rather than the commitment to a specific style that characterizes Miss Swenson's kind of poem; her subjects are largely scraps of mundane experience somehow made at once personal and mythic. Opening an egg at breakfast time, the metamorphosing of a moth, sightseeing at the Statue of Liberty, all become very important matters in a slightly weird scheme of things which we have no hesitancy, finally, in accepting. The beginning of her opening poem, for example, turns an unwonted but not uncommon catastrophe into a manifestation of a more universal natural history:

> *The hammer struck my nail, instead of nail.*
> *A moon flinched into being. Omen-black*
> *it began its trail. Risen from horizon*
> *on my thumb (no longer numb and indigo)*
> *it waxed yellow, waned to a sliver that now*
> *sets white, here at the rim I cut tonight.*
>
> *I make it disappear, but mark its voyage*
> *over my little oval ceiling that again*
> *is cloudless, pink and clear . . .*

But even here, the diction seems to be surviving the fretted, quirky versification, and in some of the poems that are less successful in their entirety than "Almanac," the question arises as to whether the particular insight isn't often more powerful and compelling than the poem itself. Miss Swenson's obvious fondness in this volume for the riddles and intricate kennings of early Germanic poetry is often put to its most effective uses not in the more schematic applications of "Seven Natural

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Songs," but rather throughout the book in the frequent animations of lifeless objects or bodying-forth of observations into feelings. "An Extremity" is a loving and sustained set of five-finger exercises, in this case, fantasies about the poet's hand "Roused from napping in my lap"; it proceeds brilliantly to its conclusion, in the penultimate line, but in the very last one something almost spurious appears to happen:

Left one looked at right one writes
Star Harp Beast Family of Five
Map laid live in my lap
Clapped together the two arrive are stated
the poem made extremeties mated

Here, the attempt made to round off the poem is less successful than those made throughout its course to keep it going. The patent reference to the verbal world so well avoided in the consideration of the hand itself is almost forced and obtrusive; perhaps it is for some of this same reason that the *calligrammes* and typographical frivolities of many of the poems give the impression of getting in the way of Miss Swenson herself. For Miss Swenson herself is often spectacular and original in her most spontaneous responses to the world, her own person or even what she has just said ("The summer that I was ten—/ Can it be there was only one / summer that I was ten? It must / have been a long one then"). It is just that the conceit, rather than the poem, ends up all too often as her ultimate and most effective unit of expression.

Of all these second books, Donald Hall's seems to be most conscious of itself as helping to shape an eventual corpus; and while such a kind of literary self-consciousness can often prove unfortunate, its absence can make itself shown in the relative modesty of David Wagoner's attention to the crafting of each poem, (rather than, ultimately, to the meaning of a total personal statement), or in May Swenson's almost commonplace book-like assembly of the records of experience (whereas Marianne Moore and even more so, Elizabeth Bishop, both contrive often to make an individual poem do the work of a volume, for example). Perhaps the basis for the most important distinction here lies in what each poet considers a poem to be. For Mr. Hall much more than for either of the others, a poem is less an artifact (questions of technique and "care" notwithstanding) than a kind of statement for which he wishes to be peculiarly responsible—with that kind of responsibility, perhaps, invoked in a deadpan way by Frank O'Hara,

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in a poem of his (and about it): "It is even in prose. I am a real poet." It is unfortunate that Mr. Hall's more demanding concerns led him to doff his characteristic virtues and put on a subject and a style toward which he never really warms.

The problem of adding to an irrevocably established and permanently shaped *oeuvre* should not, under most conditions, prove to be a difficult one. Yet for almost any book that E. E. Cummings could now produce the difficulties would tend to increase; and for his new collection, they prove almost catastrophic. The current volume contains a poem of each of his most familiar sorts: little sighing *aperçus* and more wry observations dripping down the page, schematically constructed strophic lyrics, blocky, rhetorical sonnets of a generally cheerful mien (with final couplets like "-do lovers love? why then to heaven with hell / whatever sages say and fools, all's well"), and the like. *95 Poems* is a weak book, containing fewer interesting or charming poems than *XAIPE* of eight years ago, and reflecting credit on its author only by demonstrating that his acknowledged and familiar corpus of work can withstand such additions. Two or three poems only (numbers 34, 35 and 52, notably) might be said to deserve inclusion in the volumes of selected Cummings that most of us would like to prepare for ourselves. As for the rest, it is filled with disturbing assurances of the truth of what we have suspected for a long time, namely, that Mr. Cummings's view of the world will no longer do. The diction that served well enough once to embrace and enfold "olaf glad and big" and the not unsage advice of "the way to hump a cow is not" has worn through to the simplistic tatters below. "Thanksgiving (1956)" ends as

uncle sam shrugs his pretty
pink shoulders you know how
and he twitches a liberal titty
and lisps "i'm busy right now"

so rah-rah-rah democracy
let's all be thankful as hell
and bury the statue of liberty
(because it begins to smell)

Even as a "poetic" response to the Hungarian revolt, this shadow of a posture can only embarrass. That number 77 in this collection is really Cummings, however, is hard to believe: "i am a little church

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(no great cathedral) / far from the splendor and squalor of hurrying cities," it begins, and the remainder is no joke, no joke at all.

Perhaps if one were allowed to believe that at one point or another a joke was actually going on, it might be rather easier to take the recent portions of José Garcia Villa's *Selected Poems and New.* Except for what I think is the indisputably genuine poetic achievement of "Have Come, Am Here," his first book of verse which appeared in 1944, Mr. Villa's output has proved quite exasperating. He has continued from his second volume the pointless use of commas, in lieu of spaces between every word in every poem, that continues to send one howling to an oculist. Some forty-seven of his newest poems are "adaptations" of portions of prose from *Time,* Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis, and other famous writers, arranged in what purport to be widely varied Marianne Moore-like syllabic stanzas (it's all a fake, though, if you *really* count the syllables)—the effect of these adaptations is to prove nothing except that well-written prose is harder to read when broken up into patterns of short lines of varying length in which it was not designed to be cast. A selection of some thirty early lyrics that must have been put aside at the time that *Have Come, Am Here* was assembled completes the volume, save for a chatterboxy preface, signed by Dame Edith Sitwell, that concludes with an improbable superlative about Mr. Villa's poetry, rapping at one's good humor like an angry, assertive cane.

Mr. Villa's talent was always a peculiar and somewhat limited one, and often tended to vitiate the effect of its successes by not letting well enough alone. For each really fine poem like "Be Beautiful, Noble, Like the Antique Ant," there would always be many betrayed promises. For example, the stanza

Dig up Time like a tiger
Dig up the beautiful grave
The grave is graveless
And God is Godless

is typical of the poet's earlier work. The beautiful first two lines are not served well by the addition of the two following ones, which, despite the prior occurrence in the poem of "The tiger is tigerless," are not even clear mystical English. The echoes of this early strange union of Emily Dickinson, E. E. Cummings and some of the margins of Metaphysical devotional poetry are even fewer and farther between in the new poems than in the second volume, where only rarely did the eye pick out, from a forest of commas, lines like

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I,it,was,that,saw,
God,dancing,on,phosphorescent,toes,
Among,the,strawberries,

which one does not even have to be an admirer of the poetry of Gregory Corso to appreciate. But any real progress that might have survived Mr. Villa's (admittedly underivative) typographical aberration is swamped in further indulgence in what charity could at best characterize as eccentricity.

John Hollander

A WORLD THAT NEVER MADE HIM

CHILD OF OUR TIME. By Michel del Castillo. Knopf. $3.75. Oxford University Press. London. 30s.

Anyone who has ever had the experience of reading nothing but newspapers and current magazines for an extended period of time begins, at some point, to feel that it's all up with the human spirit—the endless deluge of facts, the incessant reiteration of crisis, the dead weight of material circumstances begin to seem simply too much to bear. The office of journalism is the recording of these facts, and it analyzes and discusses them with the general intention of accommodation—it tries to tell us how we are to live with what has recently happened, how, as we like to say, we are to adjust ourselves to the ever-changing and ever-demanding external world. In our time, novels have more and more tended to define life in this journalistic way, to conceive of our internal identity as being perpetually formed and reformed under the pressure of large cultural and political events. No group of novels represents this tendency more plainly than those which have been written in the last few years about young people and often by young people—e.g. Françoise Sagan and all her imitators and successors.

The characters in such books are awfully knowing and consciously self-possessed and speak in a wearily epigrammatic style. They have learned to lisp their numbers by reading translations of Haiku instead of *Mother Goose*; *Bonjour Tristesse* has been their *Little Women* and *The Catcher in the Rye* their *Water Babies*. They are the wise and tired virgins; and they are obsessed with age, their own "old" age. They are young people for whom life has been too much since they were in their cradles, and they pass from childhood directly into premature senility.

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There was a time, I suppose, when it was possible to believe that Hazlitt's great essay, "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth," stated an enduring truth about human nature: "No young man believes he shall ever die." But, at least in novels, these days the reveries and conversations of eighteen-year-old girls seem rarely to stray from wrinkles and crows-feet, sagging breasts and haunches. Whenever they look at their parents they shudder: for them the grim reaper begins his work at the vernal equinox.

Yet we ought also to remember that our notions of certain distinct periods of life (of, say, boyhood and young manhood) are themselves historical and were to a considerable extent created by nineteenth-century English writers—Wordsworth may be said to have virtually invented the idea of boyhood—and by the English schools, which institutionalized an entire period of growth and almost seemed to have permanently stabilized it by means of the ritual life of the institution. It is quite possible that these stages of life are dissolving; the typical notion now is that one passes from childhood into what is called adolescence, which is not really a semi-autonomous state of being but the state of being a problem. Such changes in society and in our ideas are registered by young novelists; and despite the crudity of the registration, despite their clichés and silliness and spiritlessness, they do represent a response, and not a simply dishonorable one, to the world of shifting arrangements and institutions. They are symptoms of how the young of our time are capable of self-conscious submission to an environment that they feel is hostile to their existence and to their freedom to pursue what we think of as self-realization.

It might be possible to take them even more seriously and sympathetically, even to admit that they could be in some essential way justified, were it not for the appearance now and then of a book that shows up this phenomenon of youthful lassitude and submissive wisdom as the rather minimal and unengaging thing it is. Such a book is Michel del Castillo's *Child of Our Time*. Tanguy, the protagonist of this fictionalized autobiography, has also had an experience of our time, and in spades. Tanguy's mother worked for the Loyalists in Spain; after their defeat she and her son flee to France and to her husband who despises his wife's politics; in 1940 he denounces his wife and child to the Vichy French, and they are put in a concentration camp. They contrive an escape, and then eight-year-old Tanguy's mother deserts him and makes her way to England, while he winds up in a German concentration camp, where he spends the rest of the war.

Tanguy is truly robbed of his childhood: "He was absolutely alone. He was going to be treated as though he were a man. He was no

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longer a child. . . . His only conscious awareness was of being unbelievably old. The knowledge that he was only nine seemed an absurdity." Betrayed by his parents, utterly orphaned, living through the most hideous events in the history of the race, surrounded by murder, inhumanity, savagery, he manages to survive, and to survive with honor, to sustain himself as an individual who recognizes himself as one, and who wants to go on living.

Nor do the horrors end when the war does. Tanguy is shipped off to Spain and taken into an orphanage-reformatory run by an order of Brothers; and then the same thing begins all over again, for this place is just another concentration camp. " 'You're not in France now,' the man in the cassock said. His voice was flat and dull. 'We give your kind of scum some discipline here. You'll stick to the rules if you know what's good for you. Otherwise—' " And he is treated like scum again, and again he survives, to escape and find refuge at a college run by a kindly Jesuit who helps him begin to put together the pieces of life that are left to him. Finally, after several other demoralizing experiences, he smuggles himself back into France and after more than twelve years of appalling destitution meets once more the parents who had deserted and betrayed him. They are impossible people (but very unlike the sad old incompetents that most current novels about the young specialize in), and Tanguy finds he must get away from them and make his own life.

How this miracle happened—for it does seem miraculous that a recognizable human being with wants and passions, with self-respect, with will and the power of stubborn defiance should emerge alive from these experiences—I don't think it possible or wise to try to ascertain. There are, however, certain recurrent images in the novel that arrest the reader and seem worth looking at by reason of their quality of anachronism. The chief of these is the image of the orphan; never, I believe, since *Oliver Twist* has the experience of the neglected child been written about with such purity and poignancy.

"He felt in himself the collective nostalgia of all children who, without parents and without love, still dream of the Christmas season. The unspoken yearning of children everywhere stirred in him: those that Dickens portrayed in his Christmas Carol, all orphans and charity boys and every one, boy or girl, that had never known true affection. He felt in his innermost heart what all these poor deprived creatures felt: the lack of any happy memories."

In the jungle of the concentration camp, Tanguy has nothing to fall back upon, no institution or organization that he can protect him-

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self with, nothing that he can really blame, no one whom he can hold directly responsible for his misery:

"In this camp neither good nor evil, happiness or sorrow meant anything at all: the one object was survival. Tanguy learned to regard every moment wrested from death as a tremendous victory. He learned to speak sparingly; his most ordinary actions and gestures became clothed in new, almost symbolic meaning. These gestures were, in fact, the public affirmation of his continued existence as an individual."

And so because he is reduced to rely for his survival on his primitive humanity, on the emotions that he can support and recreate every day in himself, and on the scraps of affection that he can salvage here and there in a world gone to pieces, he is able to become what we can only recognize as something very old-fashioned and unlikely: a hero. In his life, the ancient and inspiring idea of adversity overcome, of a human will resisting and defying life and society to do their worst, and transcending through its own resources the worst that can be done, is realized with simplicity and conviction.

Child of Our Time is distinguished in the purity and sincerity of its feelings—for that alone it deserves to be read. It is important for us to know that these emotions are still possible, that they are not merely literary and historical, and that a human being can still survive whatever life the modern world offers him by resistance, by self-reliance—it is even useful to know that a virtue like self-reliance is still conceivable and may not be the self-deception that novels about young people regularly tend to imply it is.

It is also important because it sets itself up against what I have called the journalistic conception of the human spirit. It denies that we are simply and irredeemably what the world has made us; it represents a rediscovery of the internality of spirit, a rediscovery that every person has always to make for himself. It tells us that we still have that greatest gift, the energy of life itself, and that this energy of inner life is as important and as determining as all the terrible and dreary and coarsening experiences that seem to be the lot of so many of us in these times.

Steven Marcus

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LOOKING FORWARD IN ANGER

CONVICTION. Edited by Norman MacKenzie. MacGibbon & Kee. 18sh.

Conviction, a symposium of twelve essays by Socialist intellectuals affiliated with the Labour Party, has won the respectful and sympathetic attention of the reviewers, not excluding those writing for the more highbrow Conservative journals. On the whole this welcome is deserved, for the book does strike a new note. It is a far more serious and significant production than its absurd companion volume, *Declaration*—that manifesto of literary Existentialism-and-water; and at the same time it avoids the faults of dullness and conventionality which have come to be associated with Fabianism. All the contributors are under forty, and what they have to say about the Welfare State, and the post-war world in general, has a freshness not to be found in official Labour Party literature. Some of the essays are strikingly good; Mr. Peter Townsend has already made a mark with his analysis of the enduring problem of poverty; Mr. Raymond Williams and Mr. Richard Hoggart are thought-provoking on the subject of popular culture; and there is a first-rate essay on political philosophy by Miss Iris Murdoch. Even the lesser contributions are at least distinguished by an infusion of genuine seriousness.

All the same, there are several things wrong with *Conviction,* and it may do no harm to note these deficiencies, since they are linked to one of the chief problems the authors are concerned with—the need to evolve a genuinely modern consciousness. In the first place, the book is oddly parochial in tone and content. Aside from the customary references to Suez and Cyprus—both supposed to demonstrate the moral delinquency of Conservatism, though in fact the seeds of trouble were sown under the Labour Government—the outside world is disposed of in two of the weakest essays among the collection: an autobiographical skit on the Foreign Office and a pseudo-Orwellian sketch of savagery and repression in Kenya. There is nothing whatsoever on the USSR, nothing on America, nothing on Asia, nothing on Europe—one has the feeling that the authors would gladly consign all these troublesome areas to perdition, their real concern being with such things as education and the operation of the health service. This may be an understandable attitude, but it is almost a caricature of the insularity now standard among a certain type of Labour Party supporter. By comparison, the Fabians have become world-minded, whatever their other faults. To compare this volume with the 1957 *Fabian International Essays* is to

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grasp the distinction between sectarian adolescence and political maturity.

Allied with this dislike of the outside world, which naturally takes the form of neutralist pacifism, there is an equally total indifference to European, or American, or Russian, or Asian, *thinking*. No reader of this symposium would gather from it that there are Socialists outside Britain, Socialist theories other than British Labourism, or indeed problems common to Socialists and non-Socialists: for example, the racial problem (not in Kenya, but where it really matters—in America, in South Africa, and in Britain itself). Nor is there any indication that the authors have given a moment's thought to such questions as European union, British relations with the Continent, Commonwealth unity, or Anglo-American orientation, as against Europeanism, etc. Is none of this important? It is true that Mr. Paul Johnson, who contributes an autobiographical essay, assigns to Paris (or rather to the Left Bank cafés) a special place in his political education; but for him the problem of France is epitomized by the brutality of the Paris police, and it would seem that the only Frenchman he trusts is M. Claude Bourdet, the editor of *France-Observateur,* a weekly much patronized by ex-Communists and post-Existentialists on the fringe of the major groups. Readers of the *New Statesman,* of which Mr. Johnson is assistant editor, have in recent months been able to enjoy the spectacle of editorial bewilderment at de Gaulle's incomprehensible refusal to follow the road (to Fascism) mapped out for him by MM. Johnson and Bourdet. With such an outlook it is not surprising that the analysis of international affairs remains the weakest spot in the intellectual armor of Britain's *Nouvelle Gauche.*

Lastly there is Miss Iris Murdoch's essay entitled *A House of Theory.* It has won a great deal of praise, all of it deserved, for it is unquestionably the most closely reasoned of the twelve contributions. In her triple role of philosopher, literary critic, and novelist, Miss Murdoch looks like becoming the Simone de Beauvoir of the British Left, except that she is both more intelligent and less doctrinaire. (She has, however, a serious rival in Miss Kathleen Nott.) The trouble with her, as with her co-Existentialists generally, is that she thinks of politics exclusively in terms of morality. Her essay is a vivid illustration of the, by now, established fact that one cannot start from Kant, or even from Kant-plus-Hume, and arrive at conclusions about politics that touch upon the actual structure of historical events. With half her mind—the half that has been influenced by rumors of Hegel and Marx—Miss Murdoch knows this and struggles bravely against the empty sophistry exemplified by Mr. Weldon's fatuous book *The Vocabulary of Politics.* But she

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never quite comes to grip with her subject matter. It is significant that, after indicating dissent from the fashionable empiricist philosophers of the day, she fails to show what exactly is wrong with them—e.g. in the case of Oakeshott that his well-advertised attachment to Conservatism is void of meaning: the traditional Tories had definite beliefs, and were by no means content to argue that "systematic political theorizing is a bad thing." Miss Murdoch is mistaken in supposing that Conservatism as a doctrine implies hostility to theoretical thinking—there is plenty of theorizing in Burke, not to mention the Continental traditionalists, from de Maistre to Ortega. And why talk of "Benthamite scepticism"? No one was more dogmatic than Bentham. His reasoning was shallow, which is quite a different matter. On balance, then, *Conviction* fails to come off as a statement of Socialist theory, though it justifies its title by the vigor with which the twelve authors conduct their search for a new character—the up-to-date Socialist of tomorrow. Paradoxically, the only non-political essay in the collection is the best of the lot; and even that suffers from undue attachment to insular habits of thought. There are, throughout this book, some casual sideswipes at Marxism and the Communists, but no Communist is going to change his mind after reading it; nor is it likely that Conservatives or Liberals will find themselves shaken in their opinions. (For one thing, there is no discussion of economics, only of the social services.) What then is to be said of the authors? Principally that they have demonstrated an intelligent faith in democratic socialism as a cause which makes sense in their favored island, if not in the world generally. And that after all is something.

G. L. Arnold

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RUSSIAN POPULISM

MIKHAILOVSKY AND RUSSIAN POPULISM. By James H. Billington. Oxford University Press. London. 30s.

Most Western readers, and especially those who are interested in the history of Russian Marxism, will probably have some nominal acquaintance with the left-wing Russian political movement known as Populism. Russian Populism (*narodnichestvo*) was the immediate precursor of Marxism as the ideology of the Russian radical intelligentsia; and when G. V. Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, inaugurated this later movement, he did so by a resounding attack on the Populists and their most famous spokesman, N. K. Mikhailovsky. With far more downright abusiveness than Plekhanov, Lenin continued the Marxist practice of using the Populists as whipping boys. As a result, what little is known of Populism in the West has come through the distorting prism of this Marxist focus. Yet as the young American scholar James H. Billington points out, in his valuable and very well-documented study, it is impossible to understand Russian political and cultural life in the latter half of the nineteenth century without some knowledge of what the Populists really stood for. Mr. Billington has set out to write a study of this movement free from "Lenin's prejudices and caricatures," and his success in doing so has placed all students of Russian cultural history in his debt.

Russian Populism has its roots in early nineteenth-century Russian thought. Recently, the Italian scholar Franco Venturi, in his important work on the political history of Russian radicalism,[1] has traced it back to the ideas of Herzen and Ogaryov in the 'thirties and 'forties of the last century. In essence, Populism may be defined as left-wing Slavophilism. Its basic idea is that Russia could escape the capitalist evolution of the West and, because of the continued existence in Russia of primitive social structures such as the village commune, could precede and even guide Europe in making the inevitable transition to the Socialism of the future. Herzen, the greatest ideologist of Populism, explicitly admitted that this theory was a socio-economic transposition, for left-wing purposes, of the Messianic views of the Slavophils on the imminent collapse of freethinking Europe and the future greatness of Greek Orthodox Russia. Like the views of the Slavophils, Populism thus compensated for the acute Russian sense of cultural inferiority vis-à-vis

1. Il Populismo Russo, Turin, 1952. 2 vols.

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Europe; while it had the crucial advantage of seeming to face the stark facts of economic evolution at the same time.

Mr. Billington touches only peripherally on this earlier phase of Populism and, when he does so, tends to underestimate the effects of Herzen's ideas on later generations; but this does not mar his picture of the flowering of the movement in the 1870's. Up to this point, Populism was not really a distinct ideology but only one strand of the surge of unrest known as Russian Nihilism. The intellectual leaders of Nihilism—Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov and Pisarev—were far less sanguine about the Russian peasant and the village commune than Herzen; and radical thought during the 'sixties, without openly rejecting Herzen's Populist ideas, played down their Messianic aspects and emphasized the necessity for Russia of acquiring the scientific and technical skills of the West. The early 1870's, however, brought about a sharp change in the Russian political and cultural climate—a change partly traceable, as Mr. Billington demonstrates, to the defeat of the Paris Commune. Just as Herzen's Slavophil-tinged Populism matured after the defeat of the revolution of 1848 in Europe, so the ideas of Mikhailovsky and the later Populists turned back towards Russia when the Commune ended in disaster and France adjusted itself to the reign of the hated bourgeois Third Republic.

Mr. Billington's book gives an excellent (but all too brief) conspectus of the many areas in which Populist ideas and feelings found expression. Populism acquired its intellectual rationale in Mikhailovsky's attacks on Western theories of progress and particularly on social Darwinism. Strongly influenced by Lange's neo-Kantian approach in his *History of Materialism,* Mikhailovsky argued that truth-as-fact was distinguished from truth-as-ideal. No ideal of progress could be derived from truth-as-fact because such an ideal could not be merely the outcome of a blind play of natural (or social) forces; it had to come from a goal set by human aspiration or desire, from ethics rather than from economics or history. As such a criterion of progress, Mikhailovsky postulated the most harmonious and many-sided development of every individual.

Mikhailovsky successfully defended this "subjective" ideal against the "objective" Darwinism of Western thinkers; but when he attempted to explain how this ideal could be translated into social fact, his position became much more dubious. For Mikhailovsky the Russian village commune, with its absolute economic and social equality, came closer to satisfying the true "subjective" ideal of progress than Western capitalism. The Russian village, he said, might still be on a lower "level"

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of social evolution than the West; but it maintained the values of a higher "type" of society. The problem for Russia was to retain all the virtues of its higher "type" of society while yet making the transition to a more advanced "level," i. e., to technical civilization.

Mikhailovsky's theory had a great influence on the characteristic form of Russian political activity in the early 'seventies. The "back-to-the-people" movement (best known in the West through Turgenev's *Virgin Soil* and Prince Kropotkin's account in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*) sent the intelligentsia to live and work among the unspoiled peasantry, obtaining from them a necessary re-education in the virtues of their higher "type" of society and, at the same time, attempting to raise the peasantry from their primeval darkness by imparting to them the rudiments of education and political consciousness. From these efforts, the intelligentsia fantastically expected nothing less than a bloodless revolution; but closer contact with the peasants soon produced a growing disillusionment with Populist notions. In the mid-'seventies, Mikhailovsky was forced to develop a "critical" Populism that sharply separated the people's "interests" from its "opinions." "If Russian life with all its ordinary practices breaks into my room, destroys my bust of Belinsky, and burns my books, I will not submit to the people from the village" wrote Mikhailovsky; "I will fight. . . ." The Populist intelligentsia now represented what the people should ideally want if they understood their own interests; and there is a striking analogy, which Mr. Billington fails to notice, between this "critical" Populism and Lenin's later conception of the role of the Bolsheviks.

One of the greatest merits of Mr. Billington's study is that he does not confine himself to considering Populism only as a political movement or a cultural ideology. He rightly points to its deep roots in Russian religious feeling, and includes a fascinating chapter showing the direct influence on the Populists both of the tradition of Russian schismatic dissent and of the allied line of Western Socialist thinkers, beginning with Saint-Simon, who saw the lineaments of the future society in terms of a "New Christianity." Herzen had long ago focused attention on the Russian religious dissenters (the *raskolniki*) as the only organized anti-Tsarist force among the peasantry; and all through the atheistic 'sixties, sporadic attempts were made by the Russian disciples of Feuerbach and D. F. Strauss to utilize the fanatically bigoted sectarians for revolutionary purposes. When both the peasant and the village commune began to be idealized in the early 'seventies, the dissenters became not so much potential revolutionary fodder as the embodiment of the primitive Christian ideal of justice and equality—the

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innate ideal of the Russian people—which the Tsarist order, abetted by the Orthodox Church, was perverting and destroying.

Nothing better illustrates the change in the Russian cultural climate between the 'sixties and the 'seventies than this shift in feeling towards Christianity—to be sure, a Christianity shorn of its supernatural sides and transmuted into a social gospel. Nevertheless, this renaissance of overtly religious sentiment among the Populists drew both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky closer to the radical camp, and both writers published works during the 'seventies in the Populist periodical, *Annals of the Fatherland*. From this time forward, indeed, Dostoevsky's attitude to the radicals became far less vehement and more conciliatory (although Mr. Billington overstates the case when he implies that Dostoevsky resigned as editor of a right-wing magazine because he was "enamoured of the new movement"); while the later evolution of Tolstoy retained the strong stamp of "uncritical" (as distinct from Mikhailovsky's "critical") Populism.

Populism as a political movement lost its élan by the mid-'seventies, when the radicals turned to terrorism and abandoned their hopes in the peasantry. But it continued to exist as a mood and a state of mind among the intelligentsia throughout the 'eighties, although now it was frankly accepted as a vision and a dream rather than as a feasible social goal. The inroads of Russian capitalism in the 'eighties ultimately made it impossible to continue to believe that Russia would have an independent economic evolution; and the atmosphere of this period is brilliantly conveyed in the pervasive melancholy of Chekhov's great plays. In Chekhov, whose early writings were warmly greeted by Mikhailovsky, we see the representatives of the old intelligentsia oppressed and broken by the hopeless impracticality of their noble ideals; and they go down to defeat before a rising and rapacious new commercial class. Lurking in the background is the figure of an inarticulate, childlike, bearish *muzhik,* usually sharpening an axe or carrying a gun. By the time of Chekhov, it was clear that the Populists were defending a lost cause.

The Marxists accepted Russian capitalism as a necessary stage in the economic maturation of the revolution, and they found Populist economics to be easy game. The triumph of Marxism in accepting the *fait accompli,* however, was by no means the end of Russian Populism. Indeed, as Mr. Billington remarks, Russian Marxism drew far more on the emotional capital of Populism than the Marxists are usually willing to admit. If we wanted a shorthand definition of Leninism, few would do as well as German Marxism plus Russian Populism, plus,

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that is, the Populists' Messianic faith in the Russian people, their conviction that Russia would show the way to the West in achieving the ideal new society, and their vision of this society as a Russian Utopia of Christian equality. One can only regret that, having taken so much from the Populists, the Russian Marxists did not assimilate a bit more —they could well have used some of the Populists' generous humanity, ethical idealism and belief in the supreme importance of the individual. One swallow certainly does not make a summer, least of all in Soviet Russia; but it is perhaps a promising augury for the future that, after many years of oblivion, a new one-volume selection of Mikhailovsky's literary essays has just recently been published in the Soviet Union.

Joseph Frank

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CORRESPONDENCE

SOVIET THEORY AND PRACTICE

SIRS:

I should like to correct some of the misstatements and misreadings of my book[1] which occur in Mr. Inkeles's review (PR, Fall 1958).

"The main point of Mr. Marcuse's book is that Soviet Marxism represents a coherent theory consistent with Leninism and the earlier body of Marxian doctrine."

While I do treat Soviet Marxism as a coherent theory, my "main point" is the opposite of what Mr. Inkeles makes it in the second part of his statement. Apart from the fact that I emphasized the decisive difference between Leninism and the "earlier body of Marxian doctrine" (p. 29 ff.), I tried to show, for example, (1) that the dialectic, in which I see the center of Marxian thought, is, in Soviet Marxism, the opposite of what it was in Marx (chapter 7, esp. pp. 150 ff.); (2) that the changes in the structure and function of the proletariat which have taken place since the First World War have led to an essential redefinition of the Marxian notions concerning the "historical agent" of the socialist revolution and the course of this revolution (chapter 1 and 6, especially pp. 34 ff. and 126 ff.); (3) that, in sharp contrast to the trend envisaged by Marx, the state has again become a "reified, hypostatized power"—as has society itself (p. 105); (4) that Soviet society has not reversed but retained the oppressive relationship between the laborer and the means of his labor in which Marx saw the root of exploitation (p. 97); (5) that, consequently,

1. *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis.* By Herbert Marcuse. Columbia University Press. $4.50.

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the very notion of socialism and of the historical relation of socialism to capitalism has been fundamentally changed (chapter 1 and passim); (6) that the rationality of the Soviet system is technological, not socialist rationality, and that nationalization (which I emphatically distinguish from socialization) and industrialization still mean "progress in domination" rather than the withering away of domination (chapter 7, especially p. 84); etc.

However, I have indeed attempted to *explain* these developments and, in doing so, to go a little beyond the mere statement of betrayal, rejection, contradiction, propaganda, etc. And in the attempt to explain, I have tried to point up the "objective" factors in the national and international situation which "determined" the construction of Soviet society *and* the redefinition of Marxian theory. And in doing so, I have earned the indictment that I am a "historical determinist." The old whipping horse is pulled out of the stable. "With an unerring sense of direction," I fall in all the pitfalls "into which determinists generally stumble." It is "most characteristic" that I succumb to the "tendency to define a crucial historical decision as an 'objective fact,' and then treat it as though it were in a class with such things as climate, universal resources, and population." I plead guilty to the first half of this indictment: it is my idea of historical or sociological scholarship to explain historical decisions as what they are: "objective facts." Thus I interpreted the Stalinist policy of terroristic industrialization in terms of "objective facts," i.e., in terms of the conditions under which the decision was made. Against my interpretation, Mr. Inkeles asserts that the "rapid industrialization was undertaken because Stalin decided on it. . . ." I took it for granted that knowledge and awareness of this fact is widespread. But I was not satisfied with a statement of fact, nor with the equally familiar corollary that Stalin imposed his decision "through his control over the Communist apparatus." I wanted to learn *how this decision came about, why* it was made; and I felt that an explanation in terms of Stalin's personality, his mental make-up, his greed for power, etc., was not an adequate answer. If this is determinism, I am glad to be called a determinist. But I protest Mr. Inkeles's assertion that I treat historical decisions like climate, universal resources, etc.—in other words, that I deny the element of human freedom and responsibility. The very notion of historical laws has meaning only against the background of human freedom and responsibility in history. May I quote? "Within the institutional framework which men have given themselves in interaction with the prevailing natural and historical conditions, the development proceeds through the action of men—they are the historical agents, and *theirs are the alternatives and decisions*" (p. 5; italics added).

Mr. Inkeles asks why I "bother" to "square" Soviet developments with the original Marxian doctrine. In the first place, I don't bother to "square" them but to explain them within the historical continuum in which they occurred. Secondly, I "bother" to do that for (I suppose) the same reasons Mr. Inkeles "bothers" to interview and/or to analyze the interviews with hundreds of refugees from behind the Iron Curtain and to "square" the results with his theoretical hypothesis—namely, because I wanted to understand what was happening and what is happening, and because I was not satisfied with what we already know or believe we know. However, our theoretical hypotheses are very different.

Herbert Marcuse

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SIRS:

Mr. Marcuse says (on p. 11): "The fact is that the Bolshevik Party and the Bolshevik Revolution were, to a considerable degree, developed according to Marxist principles, and that the Stalinist reconstruction of Soviet society based itself on Leninism, which was a specific interpretation of Marxian theory and practice." Later, in discussing the Soviet conception of the dialectic, he says (p. 154): "It should be noted, however, that the Soviet Marxian revision is theoretically consistent with the Marxian conception." Statements similar to this, explicitly asserting the consistency of Soviet theory and practice with Marxism and Leninism, may be found in every chapter and in some many times over. This hardly suggests that I was misstating and misreading when I said that Marcuse presents Soviet Marxism as "consistent with Leninism and the earlier body of Marxian doctrine."

Indeed, if it comes to misstatement, I must point out that Mr. Marcuse misstates my position. In my review I did not say that he *denies* the element of freedom and responsibility, only that he neglects it. And as for the quotation he gives from page 5, it needs to be brought into perspective in the light of page 8, where he says: "There were alternatives, but they were in an emphatic sense historical alternatives—'choices' presented to the classes which fought the great social struggles of the inter-war period *rather than choices at the discretion of the Soviet leadership*" (ital. mine).

Of course the issue cannot be settled by confronting one quotation with another, especially when they are out of context. The crucial question is what is the impact of the book taken as a whole. I do not believe that I have given a misleading impression of where it seems to lead. If that impression is

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not representative of what Mr. Marcuse really meant, it is because his book, not I, gives a false picture of his true views. On rereading most of the book I am left more than ever with the complaint I voiced in my review, that Mr. Marcuse regularly leaves his reader "in complete confusion as to whether a given passage represents what Soviet theorists actually *say,* or what they don't say but *mean,* or what Mr. Marcuse thinks they *really* are saying, or what *he himself* thinks."

Alex Inkeles

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

SIRS:

Professor Gleb Struve of the University of California, the foremost authority on Soviet literature, has just brought to my attention that I was wrong in stating in my Pasternak essay that the poems from *Doctor Zhivago* which were published in a Leningrad periodical in advance of the novel included even those which are "predominantly religious in theme." This was hardly possible in Soviet Russia. Professor Struve is right, and I wish to acknowledge in print his correction as well as my mistake.

Sincerely yours,

Renato Poggioli.

CORRECTION

SIRS:

Memory played me a bad trick in my article, "American Odyssey," in the Summer 1958 issue of PR, by making me say that Jay Gatsby was running away from "Jacob Gatz . . . i.e., from the image of his European, Jewish origin." Fortunately, this lapse did not affect the argument. For Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, *alias* James Gatz, of North Dakota and Minnesota and of Lutheran background, remains a legitimate symbol of the deep schism between the "Platonic conception" of America and the empirical reality.

Hans Meyerhoff

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